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WHEEL WITHIN WHEEL.

BY

NOELL RADECLIFFE

AUTHOR OF

"ALICE WENTWORTH,"

"THE LEES OF BLENDON HALL,"

&c., &c.

"But yet the cause and root of all his ill,
Inward corruption, and infected sin,
Not purged nor heal'd, in him remained still."
SPENSER'S FAERIE QUEEN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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Wheel within Wheel.

CHAPTER I.

"Well, Cecy," said Mrs. Tynedale, as she resumed the netting she had laid down in the eagerness of talk, "I suppose I ought not to grumble at having you only for a week, when you might have been prevented coming to me at all!" This expression of half-and-half resignation came from the lips of a very agreeable-looking elderly woman, who, though as yet apparently free from any infirmity peculiar to age, was still sufficiently advanced in life (and, it may be added, sufficiently gifted with good taste) to have adopted the kind of colours and head-dress usually considered as especially belonging to "old ladies;" and "old Mrs. Tynedale" she was generally called, though there was certainly no other Mrs. Tynedale in the neighbourhood to render the epithet necessary for distinction's sake. Her god-daughter, to whom her speech had been addressed, and who at present tenanted the comfortable easy

chair on the opposite side of the fire, was no longer a girl, for she had already numbered eight-and-twenty years; but her face and figure retained all the freshness and graceful roundness of youth; and her countenance wore an expression of combined serenity and reflection, pleasing enough to warrant the almost universal opinion, "that if Cecilia Langton were not a beauty, she was next best thing to it"—and changeful enough, notwithstanding its generally calm aspect, to betoken that ready sympathy which invariably invites confidential openness, even from those in whom that openness is not habitual. "All ages turn to you, Cecilia," continued Mrs. Tynedale, "so it is the more kind to give the whole of your time to me, instead of dividing it with the Wyngate people, who have their claims on you, and with whom I couldn't have been surprised if you had liked to spend two or three days. It's a livelier house than mine," she added, after a pause, "at least it ought to be, with all those young people in it."

"It is noisier, certainly," replied Miss Langton. "Used to be unbearably so in Fred's holidays formerly; but I don't feel so lively at Wyngate as with you, dear godmother! I have been intimate with Mrs. Oakly ever since I went with you to Hastings, the winter I was fourteen (exactly the half of my life). I am extremely fond of Kate—take more and more interest in her each year; I feel myself on every occasion welcome to Mr. Oakly, whose good nature and sociability never

fail, and yet I cannot say that I have, latterly, either felt cheerful while in their house, or left it with a cheerful impression of the position or prospects of its inmates."

"That is singular," observed Mrs. Tynedale, "considering the elements it contains; for, though Mrs. Oakly has weak spirits, and few interests beyond her own immediate circle, still, with such a fine, spirited, clever girl as Kate Desborough, now grown up, and in the drawing-room, I should have thought there couldn't but be a life and liveliness reflected upon all the rest, that would make the house different to what you say it is."

"Kate Desborough *is* clever and spirited," returned Miss Langton; "but, though she is so companionable and agreeable if you are alone with her, she hardly speaks in the drawing-room, and when she does, it is sometimes in a blunt, sometimes in a listless manner, which does not contribute much to the general enlivenment of the party."

"Well, that does surprise me," said the elder lady, "for when she comes here, she has always had plenty of conversation, and we have got on admirably; but then, to be sure, that is generally, as you say, by herself. I am afraid she and her mother don't make it out well together."

"They make it out as well as most mothers and daughters do, who have nothing in common. Mrs. Oakly is not interested in or about the books and studies Kate employs herself with, when she does employ herself (for I must confess she has got

lately into a rather dreamy idle way), and though she is wonderfully good-natured to that tyrannical boy Fred, and always kind to her little sisters, still, one can't expect a girl of nineteen to be taken up with those children, and with the baby, as her mother is. They might enjoy a certain companionship, if they went rather more into society; but besides Mrs. Oakly's indolent ways, circumstances have been against that. The scarlet fever got into the family, as you may recollect, just after Kate was seventeen; and what between the sadness of poor little Emma's death, and every soul being afraid of them all for so many months, the house was as good as shut up for a year. And then last spring, when Mrs. Oakly was looking forward to her confinement in the summer, she thought *that* an excuse for going nowhere—while 'baby' has been the pretext since. The fact is she hates the trouble of society: and so you see Kate leads—as she often says—a duller life than she led in the school-room; and her mother cuts away from herself the only meeting ground she and her eldest daughter could have."

"Yes, I do see," returned Mrs. Tynedale, "all the sympathy goes to the younger children, and to the boy who was her only son till last summer. It is a very common case, and when things are so, one has only to wish that the daughter, who seems an encumbrance in the home she was born to, may speedily obtain another. I just hope Mrs. Oakly understands that well enough to put no spokes in

the wheel of the first feasible thing that presents itself."

"Mrs. Oakly does understand it so perfectly, that last summer she actually lamented to me over Kate's not choosing to encourage that simpleton, Robert Hazlewood, almost as if she were throwing away her only chance."

"Well," returned Mrs. Tynedale, smiling, "that shows she knows her own mind, at any rate. But I suppose you helped her to remember that her daughter was only eighteen and a half, and Robert Hazlewood not the only man in the world."

"I said something of the sort; but whether it is because she herself married at seventeen, or simply because she is always apt to take a desponding view of things, I could plainly perceive that she was already beginning to feel 'alarmed' by the notion that, after Kate's next birthday, she would be 'going on for twenty!' and as to Robert Hazlewood's not being 'the only man in the world,' she answered that he was the only young man of independent property *in the neighbourhood*, which, for all practical purposes, came to the same thing."

"I should have said there were others," observed Mrs. Tynedale.

"I assure you," replied Cecilia, "Mrs. Oakly went over them all—Daltons, Selwyns, Slannings, Hursts; and she declared the sons were all younger than Kate, except Henry Selwyn, who is in Canada, and was then reported to be engaged to a Canadian."

"Well," returned Mrs. Tynedale," I suppose, as I have neither daughter nor granddaughter to dispose of, I have never considered the neighbourhood in that point of view with such scientific accuracy. But has a decree of fate gone forth, that Katherine Desborough may marry no man alive, except he should exist within dining distance of Wyngate? I never heard of any law compelling a woman to marry in her own parish!"

"No," said Cecilia, smiling, "but Mrs. Oakly might answer you, that if the woman herself never goes out of her own parish, it comes to much the same in point of restriction in choice."

"Yes—if," replied Mrs. Tynedale; "but with all Mrs. Oakly's inclination to look on the black side of things, she can't quite make *that* out. They seem to have given up going to town in the spring, though they did so regularly, for masters, till Kate was seventeen; but, putting London society out of the question (and it is often dull enough for those who only join in it for a short time), I think Mrs. Oakly might perceive—even in her most despairing moods—that her daughter is likely to see a good many neighbourhoods besides her own. Either she is in a greater hurry to get rid of Kate than I at all like to think of, or else she underrates her 'good gifts' strangely, not to make sure of her having a plentiful power of choice in the course of the numerous country visits which a girl with such a large family connection is always paying; and when you add that

Kate Desborough is handsome and well born, and has fortune enough to smooth difficulties with 'parents and guardians', I should say Mrs. Oakly ought to be ashamed of regretting Robert Hazlewood."

"I think so, too," returned Cecilia. "It pained me much to see her doing so. But as to Kate's 'numerous country visits,' that is another story. Numerous invitations she undoubtedly has—or has had—for people get tired of asking, after two or three refusals."

"So Mrs. Oakly, who wishes her daughter to marry early, will neither take the trouble to introduce her into society herself, nor yet allow her to go on visits, where she might see some on her own account! That *is* a surprising degree of inconsistency; for, knowing precisely what she wants (which everybody does not), she seems going deliberately to work to defeat her own wishes! It is unkind, too, for she cannot pretend—never did pretend—to be too much wrapt up in Kate to be able to spare her."

"It is very weak," replied Miss Langton, "pitiably weak, to be so swayed by other people's objections as to seem unkind."

"Other people's objections!" repeated Mrs. Tynedale. "You don't mean to tell me," continued she, "that the 'objections' come from George Oakly?"

"No, no; not from Mr. Oakly. 'Live and let live,' is his maxim; and, to do him justice, he

acts up to it. It is the uncles—the Mr. Desboroughs."

"And Mrs. Oakly gives you to understand that, if it were not for the 'objections' of her late husband's brothers, *she* would have none at all?"

"Yes, certainly. It all comes out in her hesitating, undecided way; but she has told me so, many times."

"Then, my dear," returned Mrs. Tynedale, "she has told you more than I can believe! Depend upon it, the objections are her own; and she just thinks it convenient to lay hold of some chance words that have fallen from one or other of those amiable gentlemen, in order to let *them* bear the odium. When people give a very foolish, or a very inadequate reason for not doing what they would naturally wish to do, nineteen times out of twenty one may be certain there is a stronger, if not a better one, behind."

"I think she would have told me if she had had one."

"Yes, in a general way she would; but if—if—if, in short, some foolish nonsense had given her a sort of nervous mistrust of Kate's prudence and power of conducting herself when away from home . . . ."

"Oh," interrupted Cecilia, "I am sure it is nothing of that kind!"

"I don't see how you can be 'sure,' and it seems *so* unlikely that the Desborough uncles should take any particular heed of whether Kate

visits about, or stays at home. If Fred had been drowned out bathing last year (as he very nearly was) she would have been an heiress: *then* they might think her of importance, and *then* everything else that is disagreeable and tiresome would follow; but, as it is, though she has what you and I call a good fortune, such 'millionaires' as they don't think much of it. You may depend upon it, Cecilia, their names are used; but the Desboroughs themselves (putting out of the question the improbability of their opinions being so slavishly consulted) would never care enough about Kate to interfere, unless she were a vast deal richer than we know her to be."

"But Kate *is*—will be, I mean—a great deal richer than you think," returned Cecilia hastily; "and now," continued she, "I have told you what I had no business to tell—what nobody knows except Mr. and Mrs. Oakly and the Desboroughs, not even the girl herself!"

"And where is this mysterious money to come from?" inquired Mrs. Tynedale.

"From her great-aunt. It seems that old Roger Hyndely, though leaving everything to his youngest sister, unconditionally, in his *will*, expressed his hope, while living, that she would, by *her* will, make the granddaughter of their eldest sister her heir. Aunt Judith made her will accordingly four years ago, and when she had done so, thought it right that her testamentary dispositions should be made known to those in the family whom it might be

expected to concern; in order, she said, that there should be no disappointment after her death. You may just imagine the disappointment there has been in her lifetime; for, in the absence of any kindred of old Roger's own name, the Desborough men had looked on themselves as his natural heirs. Peter Desborough, the rich bachelor, would have liked the importance of being richer still, and of having more to leave to his brother Herbert's sons; Herbert would have liked it for himself. But if they *were* to be excluded, 'they could have borne it better,' they said, 'had the property been so left as to place their nephew Frederick in that commanding position the head of the eldest branch of the Desboroughs ought to occupy.' I believe they did all they could to induce Aunt Judith to alter her will, but they only succeeded in making her—and themselves—more angry; and it seems to me as if they had ever since endeavoured to punish poor Kate for this inheritance (of which she knows nothing, and may not come into for these twenty years) by every petty means in their power. One chief engine is their suggesting to Mrs. Oakly that an heiress *must* be married for her money, and—I rather think—beaten afterwards. So they all agreed, at one and the same time, to make a mystery of Kate's prospects, and yet to act as if they were publicly known, and were bringing her penniless suitors from all ends of the kingdom. If Herbert Desborough's boy were a little older, I should know exactly what

it meant; but he is not above twelve, so his father cannot possibly connect him in his mind with Kate, and simply grudges her good endowments to any man whatsoever, because 'they ought not to have gone out of the family.'"

"I see," said Mrs. Tynedale, "it is just spite, or aimless envy rather. I understand it all now; that is, I understand their spite, and their will to do everything that can annoy either mother or daughter. But what I do not understand, is, how Mrs. Oakly, who has no reason for reverencing the family of an ill-conditioned husband (whose bad temper would infallibly have worn her into her grave, had not a providential inflammation of the lungs carried him suddenly into his)—how it is that *she* can submit to them to the extent you say she does!"

"Why, you know that their brother's will gave them greater power as guardians than is usual (when the mother survives); but besides *that*, you can hardly have been so long intimate with the Oaklys, without being aware that they are forced to show deference to those odious Desboroughs on other grounds."

"No," said Mrs. Tynedale, "I never suspected it, for that would imply money obligations; and how they should ever have been in a situation to incur such, I cannot conceive. George Oakly is very well off (besides her jointure), and I never noticed any extravagance on their part; for though he has his hunters, and everything is on an easy

luxurious footing in the house, they see next to no company, and don't make the sort of show the Selwyns, for instance, make."

"No," replied Miss Langton, "they are not what is called extravagant in the usual sense; but people may get as much embarrassed through building, and gardening, and keeping more servants than there is work to be done by, as through giving splendid entertainments, or spending gay seasons in London; and the truth is, dear godmother, I have been led on to such indiscretion, that I must just tell you the rest, and rely on *your* being more to be trusted than I am. The 'obligations to the Desboroughs' were brought about by all those 'improvements' set on foot at Wyngate, some seven or eight years back, when Mr. Oakly borrowed money, to a considerable amount, from the Desboroughs, in the full persuasion of being able to repay it, easily, when his income should be nearly doubled by the death of his father, who was then alive and residing at Blentwick."

"Yes," said Mrs. Tynedale, "he never could live at Wyngate; that air always brought on his asthma. Well, the sum borrowed must have been a large one, to distress George Oakly now he has come in to everything!"

"I don't know the exact amount," replied Cecilia, "but the misfortune is that 'everything,' when he came in to it, was not what it had been reported to be; there were incumbrances that had not been known of; and, more than that, it has turned out,

within the last three years, that the late Mr. Oakly had, in quality of trustee to the affairs of a friend, taken—on his own responsibility—certain measures the legality of which has been since questioned. The result is, that the present Mr. Oakly is entangled in a law suit, which may terminate—as he is well aware—in his being compelled to refund what his father had, from error in judgment, not appropriated, but—as people now say—misapplied; and if it should come to that, all he has of his own will be swallowed up, and only his wife's jointure will remain. Such being the case, and there being also the drain of the lawsuit, it follows that he has never been free from his debt to the Desboroughs, the interest of which is found hard enough to discharge, and it also follows that those two uncles of Kate's interfere, and have their interference submitted to, in a thousand particulars, which, I should have said, could only concern her mother. They have the power, you must recollect (according to his father's will), of taking their nephew from under his mother's roof and guardianship if they see fit; and poor Mrs. Oakly is kept in such terror by the bare possibility of their exerting this power, that she would scruple to let Kate cross the avenue into the village, if she fancied her uncle Herbert might object, for fear he should punish her disregard of his opinions by taking Fred into his own personal charge. I can't say *I* think there is any danger of it; Fred is so utterly unmanageable, has had to be taken away from this school and that clergyman's

so often, that I am persuaded his uncles are glad Mr. Oakly should have the main trouble of him. But his mother is not so satisfied of that as I am, and her dread of losing Fred's company, combined with her painful sense of Mr. Oakly's obligations to them, makes her more subservient to her brothers-in-law than is fair to Kate, for whom it is not good to be debarred—to think herself debarred, moreover—from pleasures and liberties she sees most girls enjoying; she feels the injustice, and I am often afraid lest the constant disregard of her wishes and likings should render her hard and rebellious."

"It almost invariably does so, though you, my dear godchild, are an exception to that rule; and it is all the more generous of you to feel and understand how those petty disappointments, which you bore so well, should be temptations to others."

"I had a something of the sort to go through in my girlhood, I confess," replied Cecilia, after a pause, "and I certainly was obliged to forego many of the usual recreations of my cotemporaries; but it is so much easier to submit to a disagreeable necessity which one acknowledges as such, than to yield to what one knows to be the mere tyranny of caprice."

"Ah! that is your amiable way of seeing things, my dear child; but I am not going, at this time of day, to make my goddaughter retrospectively discontented, so we will say no more about your past trials, and only think of those weighing upon the people at Wyngate, who are in the present

possession of everything that should make life enjoyable, and yet cannot enjoy it, chiefly because—like so many other folks—they chose to beautify their abode without having the means in hand. The lawsuit I look on as a misfortune—much like a fall that breaks one's leg and lames one—but it is that handsome west front, and the portico, and the colonnades, and the hothouses, that have put the family under the thumb of those Desboroughs. What disagreeable men they are! though I believe neither Herbert nor Peter is anything like their deceased elder brother for irritability and overbearingness; but then *he* was handsome, and could—*when he chose*—put on a very attractive outside manner. Fred is so like him. And yet his mother, who suffered so severely from his father's faults, and had long ceased to love him when he died, worships that boy, and seems deliberately to foster every one of his failings."

"She does indeed, and I think I can see that she regrets his not being his great uncle's, as well as his father's heir. She does not quite like to say so; and Pembridge Hall is such a very fine place—such a very fine property too—greatly improved in value under the management of his uncle Herbert—that if he outruns that—as I should fear is only too likely— it is plain no wealth would suffice for his extravagance."

"She regrets his being set aside, does she? I wonder whether it surprised her! She certainly *ought* never to have expected the old gentleman to

make Fred his heir, after the trick he played him on that one and only visit he paid at Wyngate, two years before his death."

"What do you mean? I never heard of it till this moment," said Miss Langton.

"Is it possible I never told you?" asked Mrs. Tynedale. "You were not very likely to hear it at Wyngate, to be sure; and *I* only came to know of it in this way.—A day or two after the old gentleman's arrival, a servant came up here with a note from Mrs. Oakly, begging for the loan of *Zeluco*, 'which they had not in their own library, but which their guest, who was slightly indisposed, had expressed a wish to look over.' I packed up the book, not without some inward wondering as to whether Mr. Hyndely had simply taken one of those fancies old people are sometimes seized with, for a re-perusal of the fictions fashionable in their youth, or whether he had perhaps been struck by the 'family likeness' to the hero, so apparent in the person of that handsome imp, his grandnephew. In a day or two more, old Roger, restored to his usual amount of health—such as it was—came over, in the low pony-chair, to thank me for, and to return my book, 'which,' he observed, 'was a very good one, though out of fashion at the present day, along with discipline, and reverence for elders, and a few other trifles people used to respect when he was young. I wanted Mrs. Oakly to read it,' he continued, 'but she shut it up directly;' the character of the hero was so disagreeable, she

could not possibly take an interest in it.' And all the while that woman is positively 'breeding up' a Zeluco of her own!"

A regular discussion of Fred's character followed, in the course of which it appeared that the "indisposition" alluded to by Mrs. Oakly had been occasioned by that young gentleman's having had the kind attention to present his uncle with a handsome clove carnation, so ingeniously *peppered*, that the effects of a long "snuff" at the favourite flower were, at first, really alarming, and had confined the poor old man to his room for the rest of the day. George Oakly was on the point of giving the offender a good flogging, but his mother would not suffer it, saying that with her boy's "keen sensibility" the consequences might be dangerous! "Uncle Roger and I agreed," said Mrs. Tynedale, "that George Oakly had King Solomon on his side, and he went on to repeat several trifles—or apparent trifles—indicative of the queer mixture of volatile caprice and headstrong determination to be found by turns in that unlucky boy, his manner of telling which showed me that *he* would never be the means of bestowing on him any addition to those good things of this world which he was certain to misuse. I remember he said, of his niece, 'that Kate was a good girl, sensible for her age, and without any of the temper of the Desboroughs,' but I confess I had not the penetration to guess he was thinking of doing what virtually makes her his heir."

"It is a great pity, since he was to do it," observed Miss Langton, "that he did not do it more directly; for if he had, all this concealment of the fact would have been prevented. Not that I think the notion in itself a foolish one, if it were followed out consistently; but everything about it is so inconsistent. And then, as one piece of folly is pretty sure to bring about another, it befell, last autumn, that good-natured Mr. Oakly, moved to compassion by Kate's doleful looks after some disappointment about an invitation from the Selwyns, declared he would provide a cure by taking her out hunting. 'She was a capital rider, and should see *some* life, at all events.' Kate, nothing loath, had two or three runs; but before they were well over, the Desborough brothers concocted a joint letter, in which they commented severely on the 'rashness, indecorum, and indelicacy,' of such a proceeding, and ended, in their quality of guardians, by forbidding it absolutely. Mr. Oakly was furious; and the more so, as the writers had contrived to insinuate into their epistle a hint that he (Mr. Oakly) would be better employed in disposing of his own hunters, than in mounting his step-daughter. There was no choice, however, but to submit; and I must say, that for once I thought the Desboroughs in the right, though I felt for Kate's disappointment, which I hear she bore uncommonly well."

"It was not judicious of George Oakly, certainly," said Mrs. Tynedale, "and several people besides the Desboroughs remarked upon it."

"One could not expect otherwise," continued Miss Langton; "but I did think, when I asked Kate to stay with my father and me, while I have no brother at home (except Alexander, who would be gone in a few days), that my request need not not have been so peremptorily refused."

"Perhaps, my dear," said Mrs. Tynedale, with a quiet smile, "it is Mr. Langton they are afraid of; he is a very handsome man of his age, still."

"No," said Cecilia, "it was not quite that; or if it was," proceeded she, smiling in her turn, "nobody confessed to it. The reason assigned to me (with the most solemn adjurations never to reveal it either to Mr. Oakly or to Kate) was that Mr. Oakly's cousin, Lewis Markham, is now staying with his elderly kinsman of the same name, near us, at Shadworth."

"Lewis Markham is an admirer of Kate's, then? I have seen them together, but never should have guessed it. And Mrs. Oakly, who so much wishes her daughter to marry, discourages him! Can she really think Robert Hazlewood a superior son-in-law?"

"The Desboroughs would; and that is what she mainly looks to. I don't believe it is at all proved, however, that the man is *really* guilty of the offence of aspiring to Kate's hand; it is only on the principle that 'prevention is better than cure,' for Mrs. Oakly herself thinks there is nothing in it, and I see your impression is the same. But the Desboroughs make sure that he,

having nothing in the world but his Indian writership, *must* regard the fortune Kate has, and is known to have, as a great thing to 'catch,' and that therefore he *might* seek to ingratiate himself with her for the sake of it. Now, of all things in the world, they would hate to see Kate's fortune—present and future—bestowed on a relation of Mr. Oakly's; for, though they noways disapproved of the marriage when it took place, now that they have the perpetual irritation of knowing that his debt to them may turn out a 'bad one,' they have discovered that he was a very unsuitable match for their brother's widow, and that all his relations are 'needy adventurers.' So after Lewis Markham's last visit to Wyngate, they gave *her* privately to understand 'that it was very imprudent to let her daughter see so much of a man who evidently pleased her,' and the consequence is that I am denied the pleasure of seeing Kate in my home, and of introducing her to my father, who, in all these years that I have been so intimate with the Oaklys (meeting them nearly every time I have visited *you*), has never become acquainted with one member of the family."

"My dear," said Mrs. Tynedale, "I have no patience with Mrs. Oakly! If I were in her place, and wishing, like her, to see my daughter married early, I should tell the Desboroughs, plainly, that I would not deprive her of the chance of being chosen by a man who has so many good qualities. Money he certainly has not; for I know he gave up the share that came to him on his mother's

death, to add to his sister's small portion, and enable her to marry Captain Ridley. If Kate had nothing, and had, besides that misfortune, an unconquerable aversion to going to India, that would be an objection; but with the property we know she is to have, it is absurd to call it one. I wonder whether there is any more in it than the Desboroughs' wise speculations! It would not be very astonishing, for all I was surprised when you spoke of it just now, since, though he is not what can be called positively handsome, a clever man, with such an agreeable face, couldn't sigh in vain to so secluded a damsel."

"I should think not," returned Miss Langton, who did not speak again for some minutes, till she suddenly asked "What o'clock it was?" "For," continued she to her godmother, "as you were saying an hour ago, that if I did not mind taking the Wyngate people by surprise, it would suit your driving arrangements better to pick me up at the lodge to-day than to-morrow, I ought to be going."

"Yes, Cecy, you should; so I won't be selfish, and try to keep you five minutes longer. I wish Mrs. Oakly would ask you for a little good advice."

"Oh, *that* she is sure to do," replied Miss Langton, as she rose to leave the room; "and, what is more, she will *mean* to follow it, only she never does; so I am afraid that any I may bestow will be, what the article generally is,—namely, wasted!"

CHAPTER II.

THE house at Wyngate was large and commodious; the grounds were laid out in a style matching the unpretending elegance of the dwelling they surrounded; and even at this early period of the year, while the trees were still bare, and the garden only brightened by a few beds of hyacinths and anemones, with some hardy flowering shrubs, it was evident, to any tolerably observant eye, that no inconsiderable expense must be, at all seasons, lavished on it. Miss Langton turned out of the avenue leading up to the chief entrance, and took a well-known path which brought her round to a glass door on the opposite side of the mansion, opening into the sitting-room, where she expected to find Mrs. Oakly. She was not disappointed; for, as she stood a moment without, she saw her friend seated at her writing table, where, however, she was neither exactly engaged in correspondence, nor with accounts, nor in any definite occupation whatever; for her attention appeared divided between some patterns of embroidery for a baby's pelisse, and an open letter, on which she every now and then cast a glance.

Mrs. Oakly's age was seven-and-thirty; she had been very beautiful, and was still much admired by those who saw her in the costume—and with the smile—she adopted when expecting actual "company," though, at other times, the general effect produced by her languid, dispirited look, complaining tone of voice, helpless manner, and somewhat negligent though expensive dress, was that of being very considerably older than she really was, besides being broken in health as well as limited in capacity. She was not, however, by any means so weak in body or mind as those who saw her in her mental and personal dishabille were apt at first to believe; though the lack of energy, and of strength of character to make her natural sense available, reduced her, practically, to the level of those with whom she was often classed. Her demeanour, too, was cold and indifferent; and though at first catching sight of Cecilia entering, she half rose, and uttered an exclamation of pleasure, the manner in which she rather passively received than actively returned her friend's embrace, would scarcely have led a bystander to the belief that, by comparison, her greeting was surprisingly warm. Cecilia, however, had grown accustomed to her friend's peculiarities when almost a child herself, and when the nine years between their ages had prevented her from feeling her own superiority. She no longer viewed Mrs. Oakly, aged thirty-seven, with the enthusiastic admiration she had bestowed on the beautiful Mrs. Desborough,

aged twenty-three; but she was certainly more patient of her failings than she could have been had their acquaintance begun in later times; and she was, therefore, the less likely to feel any lack of cordiality in the welcome given her. Mrs. Oakly expressed, in her own way, her satisfaction at seeing Cecilia Langton a day sooner than she had been led to expect; she lamented the impossibility of her coming to *stay* at Wyngate at present, and then, laying herself on a sofa, near which her friend took a chair, proceeded to give a detailed, but somewhat rambling account of the various indispositions and "shocks to her nervous system," which she had undergone during the last six months.

Miss Langton listened to all these particulars, with the kind attention of one whose friendly interest enabled her to take part in everything that concerned those to whom she had once become attached; and it was not till Mrs. Oakly had exhausted her whole chronicle of "sensations," bodily and mental, that her visitor inquired "what Kate was doing, and how she was?"

"I don't think she is otherwise than well," replied her mother, "at least, I can't find out that she sleeps badly, or has lost her appetite; I don't see that she grows thin, either, as poor little Julia does."

"Why, is Kate complaining? I didn't know she was thought to ail anything."

"Oh no, I didn't say that; she doesn't com-

plain on the score of health; only Mrs. Selwyn was noticing to me the other day that Kate looked so dull, as she sat beside me in the britschka, and wanted to know 'if she was as strong as usual!' I told her she was quite well, but she hardly seemed to believe me. I didn't like to admit it to *her*—it's mortifying for a mother, you know, and Mrs. Selwyn says very ill-natured things sometimes—but, if Kate looks dull, and feels dull, it is her own fault. I suppose we all have our trials—but indeed, Cecilia, it *is* a trial to me to find that Kate can't take interest in anything—isn't the least help to me, any more than when she was a child; and, though it's a year and a half now since she has been out of the school-room, I don't find her the least of a companion, for she would always rather be reading in the library than sitting with me, and when she *is* here, it's never without a book in her hand, except just at tea-time."

Miss Langton was not greatly astonished at this information, but only observed "that Katherine had all her life been fond of reading, and had, perhaps, not yet learnt to vary her employments as much as she might do, now her time was at her own disposal."

"You see," answered Mrs. Oakly, "it's not only her reading—though I'm convinced she only fills her head with trash in that way—but she will sit by the hour together, sometimes with a book before her, sometimes without one, looking either completely absent, or else as if she were moped to

death. I can't tell you how annoyed I was last month, when we had my sister here, on her way to her son's living, where she had left her girls. Those ways of hers—of Katherine's, I mean—gave her quite an uncomfortable impression; and Elizabeth said she had quite lost her spirits. She would have thought her out of health, but that she looked so clear and well, and has grown such a fine creature. That she is, no doubt; and with her aunt (Elizabeth is a great walker, you know) she went once or twice such long distances as quite astonished me; but when I see her idling about, and tell her she ought to take some regular exercise, and go out with the children—which would often be very useful, too—she invariably says that she has something particular to practise, or to write out, or to finish in some book that is going back next day to London; and then it's ten to one but she spends best part of the morning in strolling about the garden, doing nothing at all, so no wonder she gets wearied and vacant feeling—there's nothing else in it, I'm sure!" Mrs. Oakly paused for a moment, and then went on. "But you know I might be mistaken; and I did think it right, the other day, when Newman was here about baby, to consult him about those listless ways of hers; and he told me it was not at all an uncommon case, and recommended a 'thorough change.' Now, how am I to give her that? She hates being at her uncle Robert's—only goes as a piece of duty, when she can't get off—so it's no use sending her

there. We did talk, for a while, of going to town in the spring; but—but—when we came to consider more about it, George said it was impossible. We require such a large house; for as to leaving the younger children—though Mrs. Selwyn does it constantly—you know it's what *I* couldn't think of, so I have made up my mind to stay here entirely, which, as far as *my* tastes go, is the pleasantest thing that can happen. I *do* like enjoying spring in the country, and so do the little ones! But I'm vexed that Katherine does not feel it in the same way."

"By the time she has grown as old as I am," auswered Miss Langton, smiling, "she will be as resigned as you are to a 'pastoral spring;' but you can't expect her—or any one—to be young, and pretty, and lively, and *wise*, all at once; it would be too much."

"But it's so provoking," cried Mrs. Oakly, "that she should seem to grow more foolish as she grows older! There's Annie—just twelve years old—has the sense and feeling to enjoy the notion of spending the lovely part of the year just as she did a twelvemonth back, and when Katherine was her age, it was the same with her. I hope Annie won't alter by-and-by. I see you are laughing, Cecilia. But what *can* I do?"

"Indeed, dear Mrs. Oakly, I was not thinking you could do anything," said her friend, who restrained, with difficulty, the increased inclination to smile, with which the desponding intonation of Mrs.

Oakly's last question had affected her. "I am sure," continued she, "that though Kate may find things rather dull here, she would be too reasonable to feel vexed at your not moving, if she once understood that circumstances render it impossible."

"Oh! but, my dear," interrupted Mrs. Oakly, "she doesn't understand, and what is more, I don't know that I exactly wish her fully to understand, that it is *impossible*; for she might ask why, and so might the Desboroughs. You will say nothing to her about impossibility, mind, Cecilia, for there is no use in their knowing, though, in fact, there isn't the least blame attaching to anyone, still there is no use in their knowing how unlucky Mr. Oakly has been with his hunters this year, and what a sum that one cost him that he had from Sir Charles Hepburne, and that turned out so badly, after all; besides the expense we have been at for the conservatory (you must have noticed, as you came in, what an improvement it is to the house); and then that horrid lawsuit, and the thought of how it may end! It's very dreadful, I don't know how I stand it; but Newman always says that 'quiet is the thing for me,' and that makes me think the more of his recommending 'thorough change' for Kate. I wish I knew what was right. And then there are those Selwyn girls, who, I know, always keep wondering to her that she goes out so little."

"I don't think Kate is much influenced by them or their doings," said Miss Langton. "At least she used not to be so."

"Well, I daresay she is not much," returned Mrs. Oakly, "but still I feel she is not being put in the way of—in short, Cecy, I wish that letter, lying open there, were, instead of what it is, an invitation from a different person and a different place."

"Why, from whom and from whence is it then?" asked Cecilia, somewhat astonished at the oracular mysteriousness of her friend's concluding sentence.

"It's from Lady Carew," answered Mrs. Oakly, in a half solemn, half embarrassed tone. "She wants Kate to spend two months with her in Paris. Nothing can be more kindly worded," continued she, after what she seemed to consider as a suitable pause. "Only of course it's out of the question. Kate's going abroad to people that are not relations can't be thought of, supposing even there were no other objections. But if it were from a steady person, something older than Lady Carew, and for a spring in London instead of a visit to Paris, I daresay her Uncle Herbert might be persuaded to view it as I should do, while as it is. . . ."

"As it is," repeated Miss Langton, "I quite understand that you could not let Kate's first visit beyond her own family be such a very distant one."

"Oh it's out of the question," said Mrs. Oakly, mournfully, "entirely out of the question. I know nothing against Lady Carew; but she was, you may remember,—no—*you* never saw much of her, a rather flighty, romantic girl—Bell Walpole,

you know—a little fond of making herself remarkable, and surprised us all exceedingly by marrying that old Sir Edward, whom she had abused and laughed at as long as his first wife lived. Well, as I have said, I know nothing against her; she may be turning out very sensible—she has got a sweet little girl, I hear. But still that's not exactly. . . ."

"What you would choose for Kate's sole guide and friend, so far away from you," said Cecilia, by way of expressing the sense of Mrs. Oakly's unfinished sentence. "Not what you would choose, at least, without more satisfactory knowledge of her as she now is."

"Just so," replied Mrs. Oakly, scarce audibly; "and I must say Kate herself has been very good —very reasonable—about it; but it *is* provoking that, whenever anything occurs that would suit your convenience exactly, there is always sure to be some horrid objection attached to it." She sighed deeply as she made this profound observation. But while Miss Langton was calmly assenting to the truth of that only too evident proposition, "the baby," the heir male of the somewhat decaying house of Oakly, and his mother's only son, by her second marriage, was brought down, rather earlier than usual, in consequence of his having, through some cause unknown, waked from his forenoon's sleep about half-an-hour sooner than was commonly the case. This young gentleman's appearance was now

greeted by the rapturous welcome generally poured forth at the entrance of little potentates of his age and size, when they will graciously condescend to be good—that is, not to scream at the sight of a new face, nor show invincible crossness for twenty minutes after their waking. Cecilia complimented his mother on his growth and improvement since she last saw him, and soon perceiving that her friend was far too much engrossed by his presence to go on with any continuous discourse, she asked, and easily obtained leave, to go in quest of Kate, whom she thought she should probably find in a small room on the ground-floor, which, for want of any other distinctive appellation, was dignified by the title of the library.

CHAPTER III.

DURING her mother's conversation with Cecilia Langton, Katherine Desborough was sitting, or rather lying, carelessly back in an easy chair near the library window; now casting a somewhat inattentive glance over the pretty home view, which formed the prospect on that side of the house, then fixing her eyes on a book of Italian poems that lay open on her lap, and again stopping in the pretence of study she was engaged in, to inhale the fragrance of a hot-house rose, which she had just taken from a glass on the table beside her. She was—as most people admitted her to be—a "fine creature"—tall, possessed of regular features, and adorned with hair at once long, dark, thick, and glossy. But whether it were that her complexion, though clear and pure, wanted the rich glow which would at once have deepened the colour and heightened the lustre of her eyes, or whether it were, that a something too much akin to the expression of wearied indifference alternated in her countenance with a look of almost severe reflection, certain it is that the majority of those who beheld

her, when neither speaking nor listening with interest, were apt to feel, even while admiring the stateliness of her figure, and allowing her general claims to beauty, that she might be—ought to be—if not actually handsomer, at least more attractive, more interesting, than she commonly appeared. "She would be so one day," said some, while others declared "that though under twenty, her time was gone by, for she was nothing now to what she had been when a slender fawn of fifteen." However that might be, it is true that her present aspect, as she finally cast away the flower she had grown tired of smelling, was precisely that which an observer might, according to his bias, have equally described as sullen or melancholy. After throwing aside her sweet-scented plaything, she half closed her eyes, extended herself into an attitude of still more complete repose, and might have put an invisible witness into some doubt as to whether she were not literally sinking into slumber, when her instant perception of a light tread, at the farther end of the adjoining passage, proved that she was not only awake, but watching for a sound so distant that it could only be audible to an expecting ear. She sprang from her seat, flew to open the door, and as she threw her arms round Cecilia's neck, kissing her lips and cheeks with childish warmth of welcome, her whole being seemed transformed.

"So you are come!" cried she, looking in her friend's face with a gaze of beaming joy, which

lent her features all they had lacked while she lay given up to apathetic indolence; "you are come, though it's only for a peep—come to-day instead of to-morrow, too! and how good of you to come and find me out so soon, though the time seemed long enough while I was waiting."

"Then you knew I was here?"

"Oh yes, I did," answered Kate Desborough, looking down with a smile and a blush. "I saw you walking through the flower-garden nearly three quarters of an hour back. But," continued she, raising her eyes with a half mischievous, half demure glance, "I thought you would find your way here at last, and I was not going to disturb your first solemn talk with mamma; especially as I know by heart what it was all about."

"Are you sure of that, Miss Kate?"

"Yes, sure! Mamma told you how and why she had had to part with the cook, who had lived five years with us, and what a bad one came to us from Mrs. Walters, and how she doesn't know whether she can keep the present one."

"I heard nothing about cooks."

"Then she told you how ill baby was six weeks ago with his teething, and how it was that Mr. Newman couldn't come over to see him, but only Mr. Miller, the assistant, who had never been before, except to doctor the servants. You are laughing, Cecilia, so I see it was that."

"No, Kate, I am laughing at your second guess being no better than your first."

"Isn't it?" cried Miss Desborough. "Then mamma must have been telling you what a provoking girl I am! I can't help being right this time, Cecilia."

"Well, I can't say that you are exactly wrong, Kate; though Mrs. Oakly expressed more regret than blame in speaking of—of—one or two little things in which . . . ."

"I daresay I do behave very much as I ought not," interrupted Katherine, vehemently. "So don't spare me, Cecilia—say out what I am sure is in your mind! Say that I don't try as much as I ought to please mamma!"

"If you like, I will, my dear; but I don't see any particular use in *my* lecturing you, when you know your faults so well youself."

"Yes, I do know them," rejoined Katherine, in a tone that was grave even to sadness, "and therefore, I suppose I am the more inexcusable for not curing myself of them; but you don't know, Cecilia, how terribly difficult it is."

"Not know how difficult it is to get rid of faults! My dear Kate! what are you thinking of?"

"Oh, I see, what I said sounded very nonsensical—didn't at all express what I meant. I wished to make you understand, if I could—without seeming to want to excuse myself for not trying—that there really is a difficulty in the way of my pleasing mamma, beyond that which there always must be in striving to do right. For I

don't think I annoy mamma by doing or not doing any particular thing that I might leave off, or begin setting about; but she is not pleased generally—if you can feel what I mean—because I don't seem always interested in what's going on in the house; and yet how can I, when it is all *so* uninteresting?"

"The fact is, my dear Kate, you find it difficult to be sympathizing; but you like to be sympathized with, don't you?"

"Oh, yes! That's why your visits are such a delight to me. And I daresay I could sympathize more with mamma (except just about the cooks) if she ever seemed to think or know the least in the world what really interests me. But though I am aware she wishes, altogether, that I should be happy and comfortable, I don't think that if I tried for ever so long, I could give her a notion of what might make me so. Now, would not you, Cecilia, have found it very difficult, when you were my age, to change, all at once, not only your employments, but your tastes? To give up, in a moment, every liking and interest that you had been inspired with in the course of your education, and, as it were, to forget the very things you had been made fond of, and been praised, while in the school-room, for being fond of? It's hard even to believe that one *ought* to do so for the sake of what is to be put in their place, when one is not so situated that counting up the linen for the wash, or going to play with the children in the

nursery, should be of *use* to one's parents. You will tell me it is not *only* such things as those, that I am wished to do rather than read Schiller or Dante; and you have often urged me to make myself more mamma's companion; but what have I to say to her? that she cares to hear, I mean; for I really have tried, now and then, but it never seemed to give the least satisfaction."

"Well, Kate," returned Miss Langton, "I can tell you of one thing which *has* given your mother satisfaction; and that is, your bearing your disappointment about Lady Carew so well."

"You see it was not exactly a disappointment, Cecy," said Miss Desborough, somewhat disdainfully; "for, of course, I was sensible, as I read Isabella Carew's letter, that I might just as well receive an invitation from the man in the moon to go and stay with *him*. If I am not to visit *you* at Shadworth, how should I be allowed to visit *her* in Paris? I just took it to mamma, because I wished her to know I had had such a thing, without a notion of any answer but a refusal, which is only not gone for the reason that, as Isabella kindly tells me not to decide against her in a hurry, I don't like to seem as if I had, though the decision is far enough from being in my hands. I shall have to compose my reply to-morrow, I conclude; but it is rather a comfort not to be obliged to set to that work to-day."

"Well, if I am not to call it a disappointment, Kate, I may say you bear the vexation very resignedly."

"I don't know that there is much resignation in the matter," returned Kate, rather bluntly; "at least I don't think there would be, if I entirely and unqualifiedly wished to be allowed to accept; but the fact is, that although I should like excessively to see Paris, I am not sure if the sight of that horrid old Sir Edward Carew as Isabella's husband, and the thought of all I used to feel for her before she so completely disenchanted and disappointed me, would not spoil the taste of every pleasure, procured me by part of the price for which she sold herself! I can tell you, Cecy, I am much more vexed at your not being able to come and stay here now, as we had all expected, than by the loss of two months in Paris with the Carews."

"You are a dear, affectionate creature, Kate! And I would give anything to be able to satisfy myself and you by remaining here; or, if that could only be permitted, by taking you home to Shadworth with me."

"Oh, I should like it so much!" exclaimed Miss Desborough. "It *does* provoke me to be debarred that pleasure; and all," proceeded she, with a half angry, half amused countenance, "because poor innocent Lewis Markham lives near. Oh, I know it's that, though it has not been exactly said to me. He would be a good deal surprised, I have a notion, if he knew what treason he is suspected of! It would be difficult to tell you how I have come to the certainty of it; but a hundred little things have convinced me that he will never be seen in this house again, while I

am in it, and that's a loss to me, I assure you; though not in the sense *they* would suppose, if they heard me say so much. But it *is* a loss, for he is so agreeable in his very quiet way, and I could always ask him anything I wanted to know, without his giving me either a patronising or a prosy answer; and if he ever laughed at me, it was so good-naturedly done, and when there was nobody by to take notice. It's all my own fault; for they never would have thought of it, if I had not been provoked into saying, one day—what's the truth, only it isn't always prudent to come out with it—'that Lewis Markham was the only man I ever spoke to, in whose company it signified whether I had learnt to read or no, and who did not treat me like a baby, or a live doll, rather.' Uncle Herbert was by when I made that unlucky speech, and Lewis Markham was forthwith set down as 'dangerous.' It's in vain telling them he never made love to me; for, as I can't deny thinking him agreeable, they suppose 'that, *if* he did,' he could not fail of success; and, as he is not going to try, the matter can't be proved; which, to be sure, wouldn't much signify, if it were not that this fancy of theirs prevents my going to stay with you."

Miss Langton made no answer in words, but she pressed her young friend's hand in token that she felt and acknowledged her affectionate regret.

"I know," continued Miss Desborough, more gravely, "that these are trifles that I ought not—

properly speaking—to complain of; but I do think it is my having no one to talk to but Annie—who is a dear little girl, only too young to understand everything—which drives me to seek solitary entertainment from books, and pursuits in which mamma can have no share, and which makes me sometimes wish for a change, merely as change, to the degree that I really believe it's as well I feel my visiting Isabella as something out of the question, or I might begin longing for it, in spite of what she has done!"

"My dear child," replied Miss Langton," it would not strike me as very reprehensible if you did long to see your friend again, even 'in spite of what she has done;' for I well remember the time when you were only happy with her."

"I *was* only happy when with her!" said Katherine, with a sigh; "for I worshipped her as though she had really been the goddess she looked. It is impossible to describe how painful it is to me to go back upon my feelings of those times. I suppose, partly, because I am ashamed of having been so deceived in one I rated higher than any other human being. I know you saw her once or twice; so you must remember her beauty; but that was only a part of her fascination for me. Our intimacy began at my Uncle Herbert's (Mrs. Walpole was Aunt Herbert's first cousin); and then, two years running, while Admiral Walpole was at sea, it suited them to take your godmother's house for three months in the summer, while she was at

Buxton, and Isabella and I were always together She was the first grown-up girl who ever spoke to me, as to an equal, of her own concerns and feelings; so that, besides being sincerely interested in all that regarded one so attractive, I felt grateful to her for singling me out to make a confidant of, when she was eighteen and I barely fourteen. Her tastes and mine were alike in most respects. Mamma used to call her high-flown in her notions, and to hope I shouldn't catch the infection from her; but indeed, Cecilia, she only appeared to me to have that disinterestedness, that elevation of mind I have all my life loved you for possessing, except that in her it was expressed with more of outward warmth, and she took less care to avoid running against other people's theories while assserting her own."

"All which was very natural in one so much younger than I."

"So it seemed to me," returned Katherine; "and when Mr. Oakly said—as he did, two or three times—that Isabella Walpole was 'the finest girl he had ever set eyes on, but a bit of a humbug,' I grew so angry, and said such things, that if Mr. Oakly had not been, as I *must* call him, the most good-natured man in England, we should have come to a regular quarrel. As it was, mamma was very much displeased, and got to dislike my going so constantly to spend mornings or afternoons with Isabella; but still, as the habit had once begun, and we were such near neigh-

bours, she never actually forbid our intercourse, nor even hindered it in any great degree. Well, when Isabella was about nineteen, and I fifteen, she used to be always telling me about a certain Lord Charles Grenville. I don't know how it may all have been, as I only heard her account of it; but either this Lord Charles behaved very ill, or else—as I *then* thought mamma very cruel for supposing—she was so carried away by vanity as to fancy that trifling attentions of his meant, what she would never have supposed them to mean, had she been more sober-minded. However it might be, she was so grievously cast down, when convinced of her mistake, as she was before very long, that, foolish as it now seems to me when I look back, I was at times quite frightened lest her bodily strength might not prove equal to the endurance of such sorrow as preyed on her. That sorrow gradually subsided; at first, slowly, and then so rapidly as to surprise me in the person who had so lately declared 'that her whole existence was irrevocably blighted.' I admired the buoyancy of her spirit, however, and sympathized heartily, during two or three days we spent together at my uncle's, with the renewed life and pleasure she showed, when talking of the winter she was to spend at Naples, of which she promised to send me long and detailed accounts. A fortnight afterwards, news came of Admiral Walpole's death; of course, all their plans were overturned, and her letters breathed nothing but present grief, and

hopelessness of comfort for the future. It was settled that Mrs. Walpole and her daughter should, from motives of economy, spend the winter in Wales; and Sir Edward Carew, who was connected by marriage with the Walpoles, and had then been a widower for about a year, invited them to rest a few days at Moreleigh Abbey in their way there. You know what followed; and they tell me Isabella is 'perfectly happy!'"

"Well, my dear," said Miss Langton, as her young friend paused indignantly, "Miss Walpole is not the only young lady who is well pleased, on the whole, to marry a rich man, whether he be clever and fascinating, or otherwise."

"I daresay it may be so," replied Katherine; "some girls don't care with whom they pass their time, so that they have certain things they value; and, if they are honestly contented, I have nothing to say against it. But Isabella, who *can*, who *does*, discriminate; who is even what most people call fastidious by nature; whose greatest amusement it always was to quiz men, not half so quizzable as Sir Edward—that she, who, besides that, had always professed utter contempt for worldly splendour, who disdained even comfort, and declared herself unable to conceive any other happiness than that of the union of two congenial hearts—that *she* should act in a manner so diametrically opposed to all her principles and feelings, might well astonish—might well disgust me!"

"I suppose," observed Miss Langton, "that with all her theoretic contempt for riches, she had found out, since her father's death, some of the mortifications and inconveniences of a more straitened income than that she had been used to."

"I suppose she had; but I never should have fancied that consideration could have weighed with her, because though they were not as well left as might have been hoped, they were not in poverty, and she was sure of an independence both during her mother's life and afterwards. I don't think I was ever so wretched in my life, as when I found out how much mistaken I had been. I shall never—never—forget the night I spent, going over in my mind every conversation I had had with Isabella since the day she had first begun to notice me! No—I shall remember it as long as I live; and I shall remember, too, dear little Annie's kissing the tears off my face, when she found me weeping in bed next morning. Mamma couldn't imagine why I was so unhappy; but she had not a conception of what my feelings for Isabella had been; and she did not know or notice many things, which rendered the whole business so disgraceful in my eyes."

"Then," said Miss Langton, "you believe Sir Edward Carew to be a contemptible person in character, as well as otherwise unattractive?"

"I will read you his description," said Miss Desborough, with rather a peculiar smile, as, moving towards her desk, she took from it a letter,

evidently of no recent date. "It was written," she said, while unfolding it, "from Moreleigh Abbey, four years and a half ago, when the first Lady Carew was alive, and when Isabella Walpole little thought it would ever suit her to become the second. 'You ask me for an account of this place and its inhabitants. The first is beyond me; its beauty and magnificence should rather be described in verse, than in any prose of mine. The inhabitants I can better undertake, and shall begin, as in duty bound, by our host. He is, as you know, considerably advanced into the vale of years; but he has none of the 'dignity of age;' is short, fat, red-faced, and, although of ancient descent and high connections, his manners are more in accordance with his person than with his pedigree. He has no conversation, properly so called; but his *talk* rolls entirely upon the comparative merits of the cookery at the different restaurateurs in Paris, and some private houses in London, on which subject—as well as on that of the exact incomes of all his acquaintance—he is very learned. I ought, however, in justice, to state that there is *one* other theme, on which Sir Edward, when in the highest good humour, is greatly pleased to dilate, and that is a certain duel in which he, in the days of his youth, shot off the right arm of a Dutchman! What it was all about I cannot tell you, though I have already heard the story more than once, neither can I venture to spell the name of the victim—it *sounds* terribly like that of the

renowned "Mynheer Van Dunk;" but as Sir Edward does not understand any more Dutch than you or I, it is very probable that the name suffers in his pronunciation of the same. However this may be, I consider my father's cousin as not a little to be pitied, in spite of the wealth and splendour that surround her, for being united to a man whose every word betrays his narrow-minded self-importance, and whose every sentiment exposes the low standard by which he measures all things. It seems to me as impossible to respect such a being as to love him.'"

"With that letter in your desk, such a marriage could not but seem to you revolting," observed Miss Langton. "But," continued she, "did she offer any explanation for her change, or did she simply announce the fact as a very desirable event?"

"Why,—yes and no;—and thereon hangs a tale, which is rather a sore subject, for mamma always says I was to blame, and so I believe I was. When Mr. Oakly came in one afternoon, with the news that Isabella Walpole was going to be married to Sir Edward Carew, I literally disbelieved it—thought it was hunting-field gossip—and, in spite of good advice, wrote off to tell her of the 'nonsense' I had heard. The answer, as every one else expected, admitted the truth of the report; but she dwelt so much upon 'duty to a mother who had made great sacrifices for her, and whose declining years would be soothed by her

obedience,' that I tried to convince myself and others that 'poor Isabella' hated the match in her heart, but had been drawn into it by her mother, who had 'extorted her consent' by playing upon her feelings. I was told I had no right to say so, but I went on; the Selwyns repeated my opinions to the Wildmans, the Wildmans to the Ashursts; and so they went from friend to friend, and cousin to cousin, till they at last reached Mrs. Scudamore (Sir Edward's only child by his first wife) in the shape of 'Miss Walpole's having told Miss Desborough that she was being forced into the marriage.' I assure you it was very nearly broken off! Isabella denied everything; denied, indeed, a great deal which her letter to me had undoubtedly implied, and I got into a regular scrape for 'mischief-making,' in the course of which I became satisfied that Isabella was not only desirous of marrying Sir Edward Carew, but would have looked on me as her worst enemy, had my wailings over her fate led to the alteration of it. I now suppose my openly avowed astonishment must have wounded her keenly; yet, in the correspondence which then passed between us, she refrained from using any expression which must have entailed a quarrel, and I finally wished her every happiness with perfect civility. Since that time I have not heard from her till to-day (I never expected indeed to see her handwriting again), and I must say the whole tenor of her letter is most kind and affectionate. And then," continued Katherine, in an altered tone, "if I am right in

thinking that her pride was hurt by the plain exhibition of my feelings three years ago, it is certainly generous in her to overcome her resentment, and to wish so heartily to have 'some of our old talks again.' The letter is so like her former self, that I felt quite pricked in conscience for having judged her harshly, and I began, just as I did at first, making excuses for her; but, you understand, I can never long to be with Isabella Carew, as I used to long to be with Isabella Walpole."

At this moment the ringing of the luncheon bell made it necessary to join the rest of the family in the dining-room, on leaving which Miss Langton took her departure, and reached the Lodge just as her old friend drove up in her pony carriage.

CHAPTER IV.

THE drive in the pony carriage was over, so was dinner; and the two ladies sat again together by the drawing-room fire. The candles on the table had not yet been lighted, and the bright blaze from the hearth afforded just that amount of cheerful radiance, which is apt to dispose those who sit around, to give themselves up, for an undefined space, to a state of idleness, whether talkative or dreamy. On this occasion it was the latter; for the warmth of the fire, after a couple of hours' drive through the air on a cold spring day, had rendered Mrs. Tynedale somewhat sleepy; while Miss Langton was silently occupied with an imaginary conversation, in which she was endeavouring to prove to Mrs. Oakly how very small an exertion of strength of mind would obviate one-half, at least, of the evils she complained of. Her arguments were growing very convincing—they are apt to be so when we are talking to ourselves—when her ideas were turned into another channel, by Mrs. Tynedale's opening her eyes, and asking "what she had been saying to her that afternoon about a watch?" (A child from a cottage had

addressed them at the moment, and interrupted her sentence.)

"I asked," replied Miss Langton, "if your nephew, whom you expect next week, is going to Paris at the beginning or at the end of his tour? For," continued she, touching the watch she wore, "this is Oswald's; it was out of order, and as he was going away in a hurry, he left it behind him at Dent's, charging me to take care of it when cured, and now I have had it for these six months, without a single safe opportunity of sending it."

"Charles would undertake the commission with pleasure, my dear," returned Mrs. Tynedale; "but if you want my private opinion, it is against confiding anything you value to the most good-natured, but decidedly the most careless, nephew I possess. I am afraid you must wait for another chance, if you wish for a *really* 'safe opportunity.'"

Cecilia laughed, saying, "Oswald must take patience in that case, and do without his favourite watch a little longer—perhaps till he comes over to fetch it."

"Oswald is in Paris still, then? Henry, you say, is at Venice; Alexander, at this moment, at home, but I have heard nothing of Spencer. How long is it now since he went to Ilfracombe?"

"How long since he left it, I suppose you mean," replied Miss Langton; "Did I not tell you of that in the autumn?"

"Left Ilfracombe?" repeated Mrs. Tynedale. "Why how often has he moved since he married?"

"As often as his old regiment, the —th; and once over, if he leaves Worthing next month, as he at present intends. Mr. Musgrave said, at the time of the marriage, that Alicia was too pretty, and too delicate, to 'follow the camp,' as he was pleased to express it; but after your good advice was given in vain, I took to noticing the various changes of quarters of the —th, and the result of my observation is what I told you."

"The 'good advice' was not mine, but my brother-in-law's. General Tynedale was staying here, when I heard of their plans from you, and he expressed his opinions so strongly, that I felt bound in conscience to let them be known. He thought it such a pity that a man of six-and-twenty should leave his profession."

"Yes," said Miss Langton, "it is a pity, when he has no other duties to put in its place, and no property to give him occupation; so I can't wonder when I hear my father and Oswald call Spencer's marriage 'a melancholy warning.' *I* think they might have managed better; for even after the irrevocable mistake in the outset (which was not entirely their own fault) they *need* not have been so uncomfortable as they certainly have been. But Alicia hardly knew what it was to be refused the gratification of a fancy; and she cannot understand, cannot see . . . ."

"Why poor people should not have whatever rich people have," said Mrs. Tynedale, drily. "It is not an uncommon delusion, among penniless fine

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ladies, who have fallen in love with handsome officers. I wish Spencer had married that pleasant little creature, Louisa Vaughan. I know his attentions to her were very remarkable; and if—like the young man in Ballinacrasy—he 'wanted a wife to make him *unasy*,' he might have got the article in her, with a fair share of money, and of good sense into the bargain."

"Ah! but you see Spencer was *not* like the young man in Ballinacrasy. *He*—whether for the reason politely given in the song, or for some other we are not told of—was 'looking out for a wife.' Now, Spencer, though always apt to be taken up, for a given number of weeks or months, by any young lady he happened to be thrown much with, was, at bottom, imbued with Oswald's often-expressed opinion, 'that a poor man had better not propose to a girl of tolerable prospects, unless he has a particular wish to be treated as a fortune-hunter;' and 'that it is not worth while undergoing such contumely, unless one is so thoroughly 'over head and ears in love' as to mind *no* obstacle.'"

"That is, unless one is stark staring mad," observed Mrs. Tynedale. "So Spencer waited, I suppose, till he was in that favorable condition for taking the most important step in life?"

"He did," replied Miss Langton, "or rather, to speak more correctly, he waited till Alicia Musgrave, on whom he had bestowed about as much attention as on Louisa Vaughan and others, fell

desperately in love with *him* at some vacant minute. He was moved and flattered; her father had five portionless daughters, and was literally glad to 'get rid of one,' to any man who could, strictly speaking, 'maintain her;' and so the business was done; for as *my* father was not prepared to go the length of withdrawing Spencer's allowance in case of disobedience, it was useless to forbid what he could not hinder. In my opinion, he would have done better to have made his consent conditional on Spencer's remaining in the army; but as he would see no prospect but ruin in any event, he contented himself with laying before him all the evils he reckoned upon, and with going over—nearly in the same words—the old speech he had formerly addressed to him and his brothers on reaching manhood, 'that he already allowed his sons as much as he could afford, that it could not be increased in his life-time, and would be but little so after his death.' Spencer knew he could not in fairness expect more to be done for him than for the others, so he thought, on the whole, that his father was kinder than he had anticipated; but I am not sure that he has ever quite got over Oswald's indignation at his folly. It was, I suppose, too great for concealment; for, as he kept repeating to me every half hour, 'he had warned Spencer fifty times of what his flirtations would lead to, but he *would* go on the same way with one foolish girl after another, and here he is in a scrape for life.'"

"Very provoking to witness, no doubt," said Mrs. Tynedale, "but I am sorry anything should have occurred to cast a shadow over the friendship of those two brothers. How inseparable they were in childhood! and still so warmly attached when I last saw them together, which, to be sure, is now some years ago. Spencer I met once at Brighton; but I have not seen Oswald since your dear mother's death." A very painful expression passed over Miss Langton's countenance, but the brightness of the firelight did not fall directly upon her face, and the change did not strike Mrs. Tynedale. If it had, she would probably have attributed it to her having suddenly alluded to a bereavement still heavily felt; but it was not remembrance of her great loss *alone*, which disturbed Cecilia Langton's usually calm features. Her godmother's quiet remark had also recalled a vexation of long standing —a vexation she seldom could master—when she recollected that her brother Oswald, her eldest, her favorite brother, had never chosen (in spite of many invitations) to give up half a week's hunting, fishing, or shooting, or to delay for that space any expedition to London in the season, or to the continent in the autumn, for the sake of accompanying her to the house of their mother's old friend. The disrespect to her godmother hurt Cecilia deeply; it was a proof of selfishness, too, and Oswald was not generally selfish;—she hated to think he had a fault at all—for a long time it was the only one she could discover in him, though

she had, latterly, begun to fear he might have some others.

"Oswald and Spencer used to be wonderfully alike as blue-eyed, fair-haired children," resumed Mrs. Tynedale. "I remember the time when I was always obliged to give a second look, to be sure which was which. Oswald's hair was the brightest, and had the strongest curl; but as they grew up to be men, that resemblance very much diminished. How time passes! Spencer is twenty-nine. Oswald will be thirty on the fifteenth of next month. Well, I suppose his 'hour of madness' will fall upon him some day, and Spencer will have his turn of looking down superior on his *elder* brother's folly."

"I suspect Oswald will never give him the opportunity."

"'Never' is a bold word. You say Spencer was not 'looking out for a wife' (perhaps if he had been, he would have chosen better), yet fate provided him with one. May not the same chance befall Oswald?"

"Oswald is more consistent than Spencer," replied Miss Langton, "and he avoids both the mortifications he looks on as the inevitable portion of a humble suitor to such a girl as Louisa Vaughan, and the misery of a 'scrape for life' with such as Alicia Musgrave, by the simple process of keeping out of the way of all 'young ladies' whatsoever."

"That is, as you say, consistent; whether such a plan is altogether wise and commendable, de-

pends upon—upon many things I cannot be aware of; for a man who carries out such a resolution, must have a strong head, and very uncommon principle, or else—" Mrs. Tynedale stopped short; she did not like to pain Cecilia by uttering the words, "no principle at all." "But," resumed she, in a gayer tone, "whatever people say in theory about a woman's 'privilege' of changing her mind, in practice, it seems to me, like most other good things, to be chiefly appropriated to the more worthy gender. They have so much more time before them. So Oswald's plans may change, even as late in the day as this, though I daresay his letters to you from Paris give no indication of the same."

"No," said Miss Langton, "they certainly do not; but then he is one of those persons who contrive to make a letter amusing or interesting, without imparting much of their own thoughts to their correspondents. I gather, however, that he sees a great deal of society."

"French or English?" asked Mrs. Tynedale.

"Something of both," replied Miss Langton; "but I don't know whether he has any intimacies —any friendships—among either." "Then," said the old lady, after a pause, "Oswald continues, at thirty, to spend his time as a mere seeker of amusement; I am always sorry to know that of a man of his age, and of his capabilities."

"He would tell you," rejoined Cecilia, "that, as things stand, no other path is open to him, unless

he had a vocation to be a missionary, or an impulse to be a backwoodsman."

"I think he deceives himself," replied Mrs. Tynedale; "deceives himself from something between indolence and vanity; but perhaps I ought not to say that quite; and I know it *is* hard for a man who is not guided by the routine of a profession, to make to himself duties and occupations that shall employ his time and mind worthily. Oh, I recognize the difficulty most fully; and therefore it is that I almost regret . . . It is a strange thing I was going to say; and yet I *have* sometimes regretted that your father was not as utterly ruined as he thought himself, this time eleven years, when you were just seventeen, Cecy. *You* couldn't have lived more secluded than you did, during the best years of your youth, owing to the kind of temporary misanthropy which had then laid hold of Mr. Langton; and your brothers would have been compelled to put forth what talents and energy they have. Spencer and Henry would both have remained in the army, instead of leaving it, the one on his marriage, the other on finding that his regiment was ordered to the Cape, at a time 'nothing was going on there;' and Oswald . . . "

"Would have gone to India, like, and with, Lewis Markham,' 'interrupted Cecilia, "he would have gone, as he had made up his mind to do, till Sir Anthony Mildmay's letter altered all his plans. How anxiously my mother and

I watched for that letter; and what joy it gave us! for Oswald's banishment was the one thing, she said, which she had not strength to bear. Sir Anthony was the 'friend in need;' his interest with the Marquis of Wharfdale gave him, he said, strong hopes of being able to advance 'a young man of so much promise;' and he even added offers of assistance, if there were any difficulty about his 'talented young kinsman's' remaining at Oxford. We know what it has all come to now; and though Oswald's leaving us then would propably have shortened my mother's life (which was not destined to be a long one); and though I should have missed the best part of what happiness has been allotted to me, it may be that *he* would have been in a better position, every way, if that kind letter had never been written. It seemed otherwise *then*, however; and when a twelvemonth had passed away, and the sale of the great bulk of my father's estates in Derbyshire and Warwickshire had left us so much more than we had counted on, (besides the remaining property's becoming more valuable,) we rejoiced in having retained Oswald with us; and we did not foresee that, after years of waiting, the death of Sir Anthony, closely followed by that of the marquis, just as his party were coming into power, would leave him without a profession, and without definite prospects, at an age when every other man has made some way in his. Then it was that my father first became alive to the misfortune of

'nothing having been settled,' as he expressed it, about Oswald; for he is proud of him, and hurt that his talents should be thrown away. Up to that time he had been quite satisfied that 'when the Wharfdale party came in,' all Sir Anthony's complimentary prophecies were to come true; and he was content to see Oswald, as well as his other sons, spending every hunting season with us at Shadworth; and, indeed, all the rest of his time that was not taken up in visits to friends, or expeditions to the continent. And you must not suppose that my father's disappointment has made him less glad to see Oswald. No: he misses him almost as much as I do; but he no longer insists on the duty of his 'keeping in the way, in case anything should turn up.' And so, from one cause or another, we have had but little of his company during the last year and a half. I hope he will not take to *living* abroad, as Henry has done, ever since he got tired of the army! My father constantly tells me, that as long as his other sons do not run into debt, like Alexander, or make foolish marriages, like Spencer, he is thankful; and so, I suppose, ought I to be, too; only I can't always. I feel grieved at heart when I think that Henry—and Oswald, who was meant for better things—should go on, year after year, living the aimless, useless life of continental wanderers."

"My dear," said Mrs. Tynedale, "your father has made them all too comfortable, in dividing so large a share of his income among them; for,

while it is not in his power to give what would in reality render a profession unnecessary, they are, every one of them, rich as single men, and so can afford to be capricious and idle. I don't say Oswald has been either of those things; circumstances have gone remarkably cross as concerned him; but there are not the same excuses for the others, though, considering the very pleasant life an agreeable, good-looking man can lead—while youth lasts—on such allowances as theirs, one has no right to be surprised if they are too contented, and too careless, to give it up."

"Yes, I suppose they are too contented; at least Spencer was very happy till he married; Henry is so still; and as to Oswald, he *appears* quite satisfied; but then he is so reserved on some points that I can't be sure. He *must* feel he has powers that are wasted, but he does not show it."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Tynedale, "he also feels that it would be inconsistent to complain, without being prepared to make his life a different one."

"There may be something in that; but I am more apt to think that he dislikes saying anything about the past, that might border on a reflection upon my father's judgment. He is so grateful to him for his kindness and liberality. It is certainly one good thing in our family, that all my brothers acknowledge *that;* and even Alexander, with all his faults and boyish levity, admits that he 'could not expect the governor to do more for him.'"

"Well, I am glad he has so much sense of what

the ' governor's ' claims are," observed Mrs. Tynedale, who, thinking that she had, perhaps, carried her remarks upon Mr. Langton's mode of providing for his sons rather far for his daughter's feelings, rang the bell for tea.

CHAPTER V.

THE next morning was gloomy; and, as the only variation in the weather was an occasional drizzle, Miss Langton was congratulating herself upon there being no necessity for leaving the sedentary employments she was comfortably carrying on by the side of her hostess, when a note from Mrs. Oakly appeared, imploring her, "if she could do so without its being thought that the inmates of Wyngate were absolutely robbing Mrs. Tynedale of her, to run over for half an hour, as she had something very particular to talk over."

"I am afraid it must be about the law-suit," said Mrs. Tynedale, on reading the note which her goddaughter handed to her at once.

"Oh," answered Cecilia, smiling, "I daresay it is only to ask my opinion on the distribution and order of little Annie Oakly's lessons, or something of quite as every-day occurrence as that."

"Well, be it what it may, I won't keep you, Cecy," said the kind old lady. "Make haste, and I shall see you the sooner back."

Cecilia did make haste, and not many minutes elapsed before she found herself again in the

"little drawing-room" at Wyngate, where she was shortly joined by Mrs. Oakly. She looked annoyed and embarrassed; and, for a moment, Cecilia began to fear lest it should be the lawsuit, after all; especially when she commenced with, "I am so glad to see you, Cecilia! for something has happened that disturbs me a good deal." She was presently relieved, however, on finding that the "something which had happened" was only the receipt of a letter from Mrs. Herbert Desborough, and she prepared herself, accordingly, for a long story about the interference of relations, intermingled with the helpless complaints that invariably formed the running commentary to similar communications; but she was certainly not at all prepared to discover that the purport of *this* letter from Fordwell (the Herbert Desboroughs' abode) was to give full approval to Kate's accepting the invitation of "their dear cousin Isabella," who had, as it farther appeared, written a "very sweet letter" to Mrs. Desborough, "hoping for her assistance in procuring her the pleasure of a visit from her niece, whom she had first learnt to know and value under her roof."

"Now, Cecilia," said Mrs. Oakly, languidly, "what *do* you advise me to do? George says I must act entirely for myself, and that very thing always makes me so nervous. You see it *is* a responsibility; I feel that, though the Desboroughs don't disapprove; I suppose because of Lady Carew's being related to Mrs. Herbert. It would be a long

way to have to fetch a girl back from, if anything happened, or if—if one found any reason to think it wasn't exactly the place for her. It was only yesterday I was thinking what a convenience it would be to me, and what a sparing of trouble, if this opportunity of change and amusement for Kate were only not objected to by her uncles. Well, they give their consent, and nothing could be more convenient; yet do you know, Cecy, I shouldn't feel comfortable, I can't tell why, in handing her over for so long to Isabella Walpole."

"I think, dear Mrs. Oakly, that you told me why, yesterday, when you said how far from steady you thought her in former days, and how little you know of her now."

"Yes; that is, I don't, at bottom, think her a good friend for Kate, never did."

"Then, if that's your feeling, don't go against it," said Miss Langton. "Kate is satisfied that she is not to go, and has no violent longing for the visit. Is she aware of the contents of her aunt's letter to-day?"

"No; George and I thought it no use telling her, as I could not quite make up my mind, and I dare-say she is setting about her answer to Isabella, declining; only she mustn't, now, put the refusal on her uncles. So your advice is not to send her?" repeated she, after a pause of helpless uncertainty.

"If I were in your place, and felt as you do, I certainly should not."

"Ah, well! I suppose you are right; and though

her going would be *most* convenient, I believe I had best keep her here—for all she does look moped at times,—people say so, you know—and the Selwyns wonder I don't take her about more."

"Dear Mrs. Oakly, I can't tell what my friend Kate would say to my advice if she ever heard it, but if I am asked my opinion, I can only give the same I gave just now."

"Of course, of course; and you are very kind, Cecy, to take such interest. You know what I told you was my own feeling, so now I see what yours is, it settles me, and I'm quite determined Kate shan't go, though the Desboroughs *have* consented."

"I am sure it is the best decision for your own peace of mind," said Miss Langton; and it being now visible that Mrs. Oakly had no more to say, (except repeating and commenting upon what had already passed) she soon observed "that she did not like to leave Mrs. Tynedale any longer alone," and left Wyngate without seeing Kate, who was, indeed, as her mother had conjectured, busily, painfully, employed in devising a kindly and gratefully expressed, though decided, refusal to Lady Carew. The occupation was not favourable to her continuance in that height of philosophy, from whence she had, the day before, contemplated the visit to Paris; for, as she with labour and toil framed one sentence, scored out another, and altered a third, she sighed not only over the weariness of the work in hand, but also

over that necessity of refusing which rendered the task of writing so difficult.

"It would be so easy if it were to say 'Yes;' and it *is* most kind of Isabella to have thought of asking me, when my last communications with her were so far from what she could feel as flattering or pleasant! If I could only have Cecilia Langton to stay here, I shouldn't mind about Paris. Still less, if I might stay with her. But it *is* terribly dull here—gets duller and duller—and I suppose they will never have Lewis Markham again."

Such cogitations did not hasten the accomplishment of the business; and when her mother asked, during luncheon, if her answer were finished, she was vexed to have to reply in the negative. "Well, my dear, there's time, no doubt, but remember it must be ready by five; and mind, it must be entirely from yourself and me, not a word implying your uncle's objecting."

Miss Desborough did not feel her difficulties lightened by this recommendation, for she had thought to avail herself of some of her relations' names to help out her excuse; but she made no reply, and returned, rather disconsolately, to her sitting-room, and to her desk; while her mother, repairing to her boudoir, was there soon joined by Mr. Oakly, who had been riding with a friend all the morning, and now wished to know how his wife had settled the "Paris question."

"Why, George," returned she, in answer to his inquiries, "I have been talking to Cecilia Langton about it."

"And has she made up your mind for you, my dear? and which way?"

"Why, she thought very much as I told you I did," replied Mrs. Oakly; "thought it was a serious consideration, letting a girl go to that distance, when one isn't . . . ."

"Well, my dear," interrupted her husband, "you can tell me all that by-and-by—or rather, I've heard it before—what I want is the decision, if you have come to any."

"Oh yes,—yes,—and it's settled she stays."

"Actually settled?"

"Quite so; though her going would in some ways be a great convenience."

"In some ways, I daresay," replied Mr. Oakly; "but I'm glad it's settled, and so settled; for I confess *I* didn't like her going, though it was fair you should decide for your own daughter. Isabella Walpole may be everything she ought to be —God forbid I should say she wasn't—but, at the same time, she never gave me the impression of being straightforward, and she shuffled abominably in that closing correspondence of hers with Kate. Her being Mrs. Herbert Desborough's relation, and wife of a rich man, of course makes her a proper chaperon in *their* eyes; but how Herbert Desborough, who interferes with her making acquaintances among the most respectable families in England, can prefer exposing her to the pursuit of all the French and English riff-raff she is likely to meet in Paris, where her fortune would be of

double the consequence it is of here—how he can prefer *that* is past my finding out! Any how, I'm glad—very glad."

"I suppose it's right," murmured his wife, in a somewhat funereal undertone, which might have suggested the idea that she had changed her mind the moment it had been made up for her; but her husband, used to her habitually dissatisfied modes of expressing herself, took no notice, and began looking at the paper. In about five minutes, she asked him "If he had seen any one in the course of his ride with Mr. Rashleigh?" to which he replied, without looking up, "that he had met Harvey (the clergyman of the adjoining parish), close to Brocklehurst, and," added he, putting down what he was reading, "he tells me that he expects Lewis Markham at Sandwood next month, to spend a week with him." An annoyed, almost a painful, expression instantly came over Mrs. Oakly's face as she repeated, in a distressed tone, the name, "Lewis Markham!"

"Well, what is there surprising in Harvey's having a visit from him? They have been always great friends. Have you any objection?"

"Objection! Oh, dear, no! only . . . .

"Only what, Maria?" asked her husband, as she hesitated.

"Nothing that signifies; for if it's really but for a week, we needn't ask him to dinner, and his calling once or twice during the time can't much matter, to be sure."

"Can't much matter!" exclaimed Mr. Oakly. "Do you think Lewis Markham has designs on the silver spoons, that you bar his dining here at once?"

"You know I don't mean such nonsense, George; but still I hope you don't think of asking him here."

"As to asking him to dinner while he's at Harveys', I don't know, for it's a long way to go back at night, considering the abominable road between this and Sandwood; but I shall ask him to come here for a few days when his week *there* is out."

"To stay in this house?"

"Well, he has staid in it before, and done no harm, has he? I thought you liked him, too, Maria."

"So I do; but you see the Desboroughs . . ."

"What *have* the Desboroughs to do with Lewis Markham?"

"Why, you know, George, I didn't like to tell you, for I thought there was no likelihood of his coming again; but Herbert Desborough *has* said that it was very ill-advised, considering he has nothing but his Indian appointment, to let him be under the same roof with Kate; and it's *his* being, for the present, a neighbour of the Langtons', that has obliged me to refuse her going to stay at Shadworth."

"It is, is it?" said Mr. Oakly, his naturally good-humoured face flushing angrily. "I thought

that was on account of the young scamp, Alexander Langton, whom poor Cecilia couldn't engage to keep away, as well as the rest of her brothers, during the Queen of Sheba's visit."

"So it was, partly," observed Mrs. Oakly.

"But," said her husband, without noticing her parenthetical remark, "though I thought that silly enough, it's nothing to *this*. And you may forbid her going to Shadworth on his account, if you choose to humour Herbert Desborough so far; but, as for my not asking my own cousin to my own house, when he is staying in the next parish, I have no notion of truckling to that degree to those brothers-in-law of yours!"

"But consider our situation with regard to them, George."

"I have considered it, and must consider it a great deal more than I like, as you know," answered he, with a clouded brow and impatient tone; "only there are compliances that are downright disgraceful; and *this* would be one, considering what Lewis is to me, and what my opinion of him is; he has never made love to Kate; isn't thinking of it; and, if he were, let me tell you, she may find a worse husband, and Herbert Desborough a less creditable nephew!"

Mrs. Oakly burst into tears, and tried, by prayers and supplications, to extract from her husband a promise of not inviting his cousin Lewis to stay with them; but, though generally amenable, for the sake of peace, to the kind of

arguments now employed, he, on this occasion, thought it a point of honour and personal dignity to adhere to his resolution, and resist, in one point at least, Herbert Desborough's meddling tyranny; so that his wife, hopeless, at last, of moving him, and dreading the vengeance her brother-in-law might possibly take for contumacious proceedings, exclaimed, in despair, "that she would sooner send Kate to Paris, than let her come in contact with a man whom her uncles had formally noticed as objectionable."

"Do as you please, my dear," replied he. "If you think her likely to meet more suitable companions, and more unobjectionable lovers in Paris than Lewis Markham, why, send her there, in heaven's name!—you are free to do it. I may have my own notions; but Herbert Desborough gives his consent; and Kate's *your* daughter, after all."

The matter was debated anew for the space of an hour. It would be long to tell how often the same speeches and rejoinders were made, and made in vain; but, as neither party would yield, the business issued in the species of compromise which had been suggested by the lady; that is, Mr. Oakly held to his determination of asking his cousin to his house, and Kate was informed, half an hour before post time, that her carefully-composed letter of civil refusal was useless, for that she was now to write one of a contrary tenor, which, to be sure, would not take long to indite.

CHAPTER VI.

"WE always keep saying 'We shall never be surprised again;' but I *was* surprised, I confess," said Miss Langton, the following evening, to her godmother, after recounting the 'change of measures' at Wyngate.

"Yes," said Mrs. Tynedale, "it would be very surprising, if people were, in fact, swayed by really important motives. One hears of this and that as being the main lever of the actions of mankind, in one class or another—*I* never knew any of such universal application as 'convenience.' The Herbert Desboroughs think it, for some reason or other, 'convenient' to gratify a fancy of the cousin whose wealth and position cast a reflected lustre, as they consider, upon themselves; Mrs. Oakly finds it 'convenient' to provide her daughter with change and amusement, without putting herself to trouble or expense, or risking the Desboroughs' disapprobation; and so, wheel within wheel, the world goes round. I daresay, if we knew the 'inner machinery' of the Carews'

household, we should find that it has become, for some reason, 'convenient' for the fair lady to forget the disagreeables that occurred three years ago, and to remember the old friendship."

Cecilia smiled, for a moment, at the idea of this "chain of conveniences," embracing the whole world and its inhabitants; but then said, anxiously, "I hope Lady Carew is not a person to do Kate mischief! She is so honest-hearted now! And, as to the sudden vanishing of her doubts and scruples about liking to be Lady Carew's guest, after being so 'disappointed in her,' that is natural. She felt it enough to prevent her wishing to 'extract a consent;' but now it is freely given, and everything 'settled *for* her,' she candidly says her delight is so great, that it positively *requires* the sobering knowledge that she must be in some way indebted to that horrid Sir Edward for her enjoyment, and that she must spend two days at her Uncle Herbert's (where the Tierneys will pick her up), to keep her in her senses. She goes singing about the house, and asking every one a thousand questions about boxes, inns, custom-houses, most of which, as I spent six weeks in Paris last year with the Bathursts, I was, luckily, able to answer. I could not find in my heart to look grave, or tell her the sort of anxiety I feel at her being confided, for her first real introduction into the world, to a woman of whom I know nothing, except that she has made a very mercenary marriage, with, as far as I can see, very

little temptation to it. Mrs. Oakly *did* not like her either, though she is trying to think otherwise now; but then I confess that she is apt to take up prejudices; so, perhaps, her 'feeling' against her ought not to influence me."

"Perhaps not," returned Mrs. Tynedale; "and, at any rate, we will hope that this beautiful Isabella may belong to what should, I suppose, be called 'the well-principled order' of the 'class mercenary;' in which case she has, probably, become a very haughty fine lady, very circumspect in her own conduct, and likely to be very careful about her *protégée*, whom she will try, (in vain, I should think,) to tutor into views of marriage somewhat similar to her own. I certainly did hear one of my nephews assert, on the authority of some friend, 'that old Carew's handsome wife was giving him his deserts;' but, when I came to question Charles, he could tell me no more; and as the Herbert Desboroughs (who are propriety itself) patronize the lady, I should be apt to suppose Tom Knox's ambiguous speech meant nothing at all, except, perhaps, that he might have seen *her* looking very lovely, and her husband looking very old, at an ambassador's ball. We must not look mélancholy about it any longer, Cecilia; and here's an opportunity, too—a "safe opportunity" —for sending Oswald his watch; if you trust it to Kate he will get it in a week, and then we can have his opinion as to whether her ladyship is or is not a fit chaperon."

Cecilia said she had already thought of the watch, and had given it over at once to Kate's keeping, with a charge to wind it duly every night, to ensure its being delivered to its rightful owner in the perfect order in which it had returned from its sojourn at the maker's. She blushed slightly as she began this little speech; and, becoming immediately conscious that she was doing so, her colour deepened and deepened, till her 'godmother exclaimed, "I see you and I have been thinking of the same thing, Cecy! I was only saying to myself, this morning, what a pity it was Oswald never got into the habit of coming here with you; for the Desboroughs couldn't have prevented *me* from inviting my own guests—and Mrs. Oakly is so anxious to be rid of her pleasing daughter—and this house is so near Wyngate! I was rather ashamed of my match-making cogitations, and a little afraid of your discovering them; but now I see you are equally guilty, I must confess to having built up a very fine aërial edifice within the last five minutes, founded on a hope that, though it is against Oswald's 'principles' to marry to make himself miserable, like Spencer, and equally against his 'principles' to *seek* a woman he could marry in comfort, the unsought introduction to his sister's young friend in a foreign country, with a debt of gratitude, in the outset, for taking care of his watch, may lead him on and on, till he finds . . "

"Oh! exclaimed Cecilia, "all that is too good

to come true. I don't even know if he visits the Carews, and . . "

"He will go there to receive his watch, at any rate—That will be a beginning! He does not know all *you* do about the young lady's prospects, I conclude?"

"Oh, no! That *would* have been a breach of confidence! Not that the knowledge would have made any difference with him; so there was no temptation of *that* kind. No: he only knows what the world in general does, namely, that Mrs. Oakly's daughter has fortune enough to be considered an 'advantageous match.' And now, dear godmother, don't let us build any more castles; for, if I were to dwell upon this one, I might begin to believe in it; and then the disappointment would be great. There was a time when I liked to think Oswald would never marry, because I thought his marriage would leave me so desolate; but since I have grown sensible that he may be an old bachelor, and I an old maid, yet never see the more of each other, another sort of anxiety has laid hold of me; and I sometimes fancy I shall, perhaps, be punished for my selfish wishes, by seeing them fulfilled. I miss him dreadfully in my home—*that* I must always do,—but I have learned to feel it would be a comfort to know he was in one of his own!"

CHAPTER VII.

The childish exuberance of spirits into which Katherine Desborough was thrown, by the sudden prospect of seeing new things, new places, a new country, could hardly be kept up for a whole week. It would, indeed, have been difficult to retain such a mood in the house with Mrs. Oakly, who, within four and twenty hours after her decision had become irrevocable, began, as her daughter observed to Miss Langton, "to sigh, and to look as dejected as if she were starting for the Polar regions instead of Paris." The children, too, who at first ran about in great glee, telling each other, and every one they met, "that Kate was going away to France," looked grave upon it as the day drew nearer; and, when the hour of parting actually came, Annie Oakly, in spite of her father's reproofs, sobbed aloud. *He* was, as usual, good-nature itself, while escorting his step-daughter to her uncle's, but his manner was more serious than his wont; and it was in right down earnest, without any mingling of joke, that he said, as he affectionately bade her farewell: "Kate, you are a good girl; don't let yourself be made a fool of."

She felt rather lonely when he had left her, and wondered at the importance everybody seemed to attach to her pleasure trip, till the consideration brought with it an unexpected, and somewhat painful, sense of being now more responsible for her actions than at home. The feeling of enjoyment revived however, after quitting her uncle's house in the company of a very agreeable middle-aged pair, who, old travellers themselves, were pleased at seeing the impressions of a young one, even on the hackneyed and oft traversed route from Dover to Paris. There was, it is true, more to be seen upon it in those days; for, though in England the hills were being hollowed, and the valleys heaped with earth, to receive the iron pathway that was to be laid upon them, and although two great commercial cities had already neared themselves by means of one finished railroad, France was still innocent, even in thought, of any such means of communication. *Then* the eye of the new comer was struck by many a piece of nationality, now driven into the background by the advancing power of steam. A station is a station, and a stoker is a stoker, all the world over; but who could class a French postillion, with the being of the same name in England? Or who that had only seen an English stage-coach could arrive at the most distant idea of that safe but curiously slow contrivance for locomotion, miscalled a "Diligence?" A French provincial inn, too—which the present

visitor of Paris need not enter—was another novelty; and, if the roads were rather straight, and the stages rather long, both Mr. and Mrs. Tierney had so much to tell about past wanderings in more distant lands, and so much to explain about the tour upon which they were now starting to explore some parts of Austria and Bavaria, as yet unvisited by English travellers, that Katherine had had no time to feel herself dull, when she was safely deposited, at six o'clock on a fine spring evening, at her destination in the Rue Castiglione.

Then, even as she ascended the first steps of the staircase, she was seized by an undefined fear—a re-awakened doubt—as to the probability of being really happy on this visit; a feeling which was rather increased than otherwise, on being ushered into the splendid *suite* of rooms occupied by the Carews, the furniture and decorations of which, used as she was to the comfort—the luxury, even—of her own home, struck her as more suitable to a royal dwelling than to that of a private person, however wealthy. She was, in truth, not fully prepared, though she had often heard of it, for the French style of adorning apartments; nor yet for the number of looking-glasses (apparently inserted wherever there was space for one) which, while adding greatly to the brilliancy of the general effect, did not tend to diminish the kind of tremor which came over her, as she set foot in this palace,

where she was to sojourn with one whom she felt uncertain if she should *now* find a congenial companion. These doubts and fears were, however, instantly charmed away when she met her lovely hostess—as lovely as of old—hastening from her own boudoir to greet her, and exclaiming, in a voice of delight, as she threw her arms round her neck, "My dear, good Kate! how kind of you to come to me!" There was a warmth and an emotion in Lady Carew's close embrace, which at once surprised and touched Katherine. She felt her tears upon her cheek too, albeit she knew Isabella did not easily shed them, and she saw their traces in her friend's eyes, as she again and again welcomed "her own Kate, the like of whom she had not seen since they parted!"

"And now," said Lady Carew, after a few moments' pause, during which she seemed affectionately engaged in scanning Katherine's features, as if to ascertain whether three years had wrought any change in them, "now I have something to shew you, something I expect you to admire more than anything else I possess, something, too, that I expect to grow very fond of you."

As she spoke, she led Katherine into the boudoir, at the farther end of which she beheld—seated on a cushion, and employed in stroking the back of a very pretty spaniel—a lovely fair-haired child, of two years old. The beautiful mother

parted the playfellows, and setting the child upon her knee, bade her look up and say, "Kate, I love you!"

There was no echo to the words; but the large eyes were raised to contemplate the stranger, and, a moment after, the rosy lips were held up for a kiss. Kate thought, as she returned the proffered caress with interest, that she had never in her life seen aught to compare to this mother and child, each so perfect in her degree; the child presenting the image of what the mother must have been, the mother showing what the child would become; the exquisite fairness of both was redeemed from the insipidity to which it is sometimes allied, by the darkness of the eyelashes which shaded the melting blue eyes; while the angelic innocence of the child's face, and the tinge of melancholy which enhanced the softness of the woman's countenance, gave to the pair a charm of expression which Kate, at least, had never seen matched.

The little girl was soon transferred from her mother's arms to Katherine's, and great progress in intimacy was being made, when Lady Carew exclaimed, "My dear Kate, you must really make a pause in your devotion to Adela! it is time to dress, and I must shew you your room. I don't think Sir Edward is come in yet, but I expect the Villarceaux and old Thornhill,—the traveller, you know,—every minute. Oh, don't be

frightened! Célestine will get you ready in time."

Célestine did wonders; and Katherine *was* ready in time to be hurriedly presented, first to her host, and then to the other guests, just as dinner was being announced. What they were—any of them—like, she could not tell; a mist was before her eyes, and a choking sensation in her throat; but, after all were seated, and she had gathered courage to examine Sir Edward (as well, that is, as one can examine one's next neighbour at a dinner table), she saw enough to satisfy her that, in person, at least, the letter still extant in her desk, at Wyngate, did him no injustice. He addressed her more than once in a pompous kind of way; but, as he evidently meant it good-naturedly, she could find no fault with the intention, though she could have dispensed with the pathetic tone of regret in which he lamented, "for her sake and that of others," that her visit had been delayed till after the conclusion of the "Paris season." The rest of his talk, and his whole deportment, tallied so exactly with the pointed description formerly given of him by the lady now at the head of his table, that, had the matter concerned any other than her own bosom friend, Katherine would have had difficulty in restraining sundry fits of ill-timed laughter, especially when the discussion of some "affair of honour," which had lately occupied the Parisian public, actually brought on an allusion to the casti-

gation of "Mynheer Van Dunk!" It really seemed as if the old man was doing it all on purpose. What Isabella must be feeling Katherine could not guess; she never looked her way; but her own cheeks burned in a degree which gave her great annoyance, albeit it caused old Mr. de Villarceau to inform whomsoever he met next day "that the dark-haired guest of 'la belle blonde' (Lady Carew) had not only 'des yeux magnifiques,'" which she undoubtedly possessed, but also "une teinte des plus éclatantes," which last was but occasional. The presence of Mr. de Villarceau and his wife (who was English, and had in her youth been intimate with Mrs. Walpole) was a great assistance; for *he* appeared quite content to let himself down to Sir Edward's level, and willingly supplied him with any news current in the gastronomic world; while *she* had a lively flow of conversation for everybody, which seemed to give equal entertainment to the traveller, Mr. Thornhill (whose own genius seemed rather for silence), and to Katherine, who was glad to glean a little information respecting the society in which she was likely to mix. Her first discovery was that she would have no difficulty about the watch; for, as she heard its owner's name mentioned familiarly, and as both Madame de Villarceau and Lady Carew seemed to know of his being absent for a few days with some French acquaintance of his and theirs, it was plain that Mr. Langton visited at the house. Her second discovery was that her Wyngate neighbour, Louisa

Hazlewood, who, with her mother, had been some time at Paris, was just engaged to a Mr. Waterfield, whose "respectful attentions" during the winter to the "highly to be respected Miss Hazlewood" had evidently diverted both French and English spectators a good deal. Mrs. Hazlewood was said to be "delighted with the match;" but Katherine was not at all delighted, when Madame de Villarceau—little thinking it concerned her—stated farther that the Hazlewoods had taken their apartments on for some time longer to buy the trousseau; and that young Mr. Hazlewood, the hunting season being over, was about to join his mother and sister, in order to make acquaintance with his future brother-in-law. It was, indeed, provoking to find that one of the Wyngate plagues was destined to rise up upon her, even in the Rue Castiglione; and she was heartily wishing Mr. Waterfield had delayed his proposals till his fair one had returned home, when the three guests took their early departure; and she herself, after undergoing a second solemn welcome from Sir Edward, and hearing a repetition of his equally solemn regrets for the conclusion of "the Paris season," hurried to her room.

There she set to work, much as she had done three years before, to solve the problem of how a creature, of a nature so thoroughly noble as she was now again persuaded Isabella's *must* be, could ever have been tempted to a union with such a soulless clod of earth as Sir Edward.

How calmly indifferent *she* seemed to all those appurtenances of wealth, which made up the sum of his vulgar happiness! No: whatever *had* been Isabella's motive, it could not have been *only* that mean desire of importance of which she *had* believed her capable! It was a comfort to know that, at any rate. And in this mood of seeing all as she fain would see it, Katherine closed her eyes in a bed curtained with light blue silk, and supplied with a mirror, so placed as seemingly to form part of it.

In this resting place—so different from any she had ever occupied before—Kate Desborough slept the unbroken sleep of youth and health till the morning sun was high; and her first waking sensation was one of such surpassing entertainment at beginning her conscious existence for the day, with so near a view of her own person gradually breaking from the bands of slumber—that, alone though she was, she laughed heartily at the absurdity of only opening her eyes to behold them reflected in the glass beside. The mirror faithfully gave back her looks of merriment, and thereby increased them so much, that Lady Carew, coming in to learn how her guest had passed the night, stood still in amazement, till, perceiving how it was, she joined in the laugh herself, and then left the room, saying, it would be "an excellent joke for Sir Edward."

It proved, at all events, a useful one; for something about the dinner of the day before had

gone wrong, and Sir Edward's temper could not be brought right at breakfast time, till his wife had turned his ideas into another channel, by telling him how surprised she had been that morning, on finding Kate, and Kate's reflection, laughing at each other so immoderately. Lady Carew's account, which was just fitted to Sir Edward's capacity, tickled his fancy wonderfully; and, as Kate saw how well it served to divert the wrath of the irritated epicure, she submitted patiently, though with many blushes, to the old gentleman's stupid witticisms, forgiving them the more readily as he soon left the room, and delivered her from his wearisome presence.

It was a great relief to learn that Sir Edward had the habit of betaking himself, every morning, to one *café* or another, between which and Galignani's, he spent the hours till the near prospect of dinner drew him homewards. Sometimes, indeed —but that was only on rare occasions—he even sallied out before breakfast, to partake of that meal in greater perfection elsewhere; but such a piece of good fortune was, of course, not to be often looked for. Still Kate privately thought it was very considerate of such a disagreeable man, to burden the members of his household so little with his company. Lady Carew probably shared her feeling; but, as the Rue Castiglione was not that fatal abode called the Palace of Truth, she was not obliged to express her opinion; only proposing to her guest, as they were now alone, to

"sit down by her, and let her find out, at once, how she could continue to give her most pleasure during the time of her stay."

"The season for balls and entertainments," said she, "is, as you know, over. If I had but been sooner inspired with the happy thought which only came upon me the other day, of presenting my petition to the authorities at Fordwell, as well as to those at Wyngate, I should have enjoyed everything so much more; should not have felt it such vanity and vexation of spirit as I often did! Sir Edward, too, would have liked it; and now he has seen you, he has done nothing but lecture me for my stupidity—I assure you he says that he never . . . . but I will not make you conceited! Besides, the past is past, and we want to settle for the future. The churches, the galleries, the celebrated buildings, which all who come here must see, on pain of being reputed Vandals, I recommend your taking leisurely. I have seen them myself, and shown them myself, more than once; but, if you will trust to me, and to Madame de Villarceau, we will contrive that you also shall see them thoroughly, in company with those who are, like yourself, new comers. The theatres must be thought of sooner; for, though they will not close, some of their chief attractions will be going off shortly to the provinces, and to foreign countries. *I* don't offer to go to them now, they have given me such dreadful head-aches lately; but Sir Edward is—

for everything except tragedies—a great play-goer; and I know so many people, besides, who will be delighted to have the charge of you, that when we have decided upon what pieces, and what performers, it will most interest you to see, your wishes will be easily gratified. There is one thing I *must* take you to, though—head-ache or no headache—and that is the 'Grand Opéra;' I would not miss being with you when you have your first sight of that for the whole world! Dressmakers, milliners, etc., etc., are in the daily course of life here, so I say nothing about them; but is there anything else, dear Kate, that I can help you to have or to enjoy?"

Kate felt so grateful for the kindness—the honest, judicious, unpretending kindness—which dictated such a speech, that she hardly liked to admit that there could be "anything else;" but her mother had strictly enjoined her—probably as a sort of salve to her own conscience—on no account to miss the opportunity her stay in Paris would afford, for improving herself in singing and in drawing; "provided always she could do so without annoying her hosts." Her own wishes went along with her mother's, yet it was only in the most hesitating manner that she ventured to express what she feared might be so troublesome. "Troublesome! my dear Kate, you couldn't oblige me more than by doing what will make you feel really at home, with home-like occupations. I know what it is to be led a life of sight-seeing,

and nothing else; and I know how discontented sight-seers get to feel, if there is not something 'stupendous' for them to behold every half hour, so I heartily approve of Mrs. Oakly's plan. You shall have the next room—the music-room, as we call it—for your exclusive possession every forenoon. It is only giving an order to have those doors kept shut; and you will be as undisturbed as if you were in your old Wyngate school-room. But now come out with me, and I will take you your first walk in the Tuileries. It is a charming morning, we can sit down there to discuss the merits of the rival masters at our ease; and this afternoon we will take measures to secure whichever you think, on the whole, most desirable."

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was so much entertainment for the first few days, in the mere fact of being at Paris, and in all the little details therewith connected, that it is no exaggeration to say that Katherine Desborough felt, literally, as if transported into a new world; a much pleasanter world, too, than the old one. The very sight of milliners' girls passing by, with a different air and step to that of the same class in England; the nursery maids and children, equipped in a fashion somewhat unlike what she was used to at home; the perpetual sound of a language she had never before heard spoken, save by persons of the upper ranks—all these, and a thousand other trifles, kept up in her a kind of holiday sensation, which buoyed up her spirits, and rendered her proof against any little drawbacks. She could not bear Sir Edward; but then, on the other hand, her old love for her friend had returned with all—or almost all—its enthusiastic vehemence; for she had now succeeded in persuading herself that Isabella had never done

anything to forfeit her esteem, and that her marriage had, in fact, been, as the phrase is, "not her own doing." Lady Carew had not said so; neither had she complained of her lot, to which she, with a sweetness Kate thought angelic, declared herself "resigned." But, in speaking of her mother's last illness (Mrs. Walpole had now been dead about a year and a half) words escaped her which, as now understood by Katherine, convinced her that the impression conveyed in that first letter of Isabella's, afterwards—no doubt compulsorily—retracted, was the true one, and that Mrs. Walpole *had* played a part for which her daughter was now suffering. The wish to spare her mother's memory seemed to prevent her being more explicit; and Katherine admired her honesty in confessing that violent pique had had its share in subjecting her to influences that had brought about a marriage of which she was now bound, in duty, to consider the advantages only. Her mother's conduct had, indeed, been ill-judged, but her own submission had not been without its reward; for, in the estate into which she had reluctantly entered, she had found a source of unexpected happiness, since her affections could never lack an object while her little girl filled up every void, which might have existed, in a heart not destined to derive true satisfaction from any save maternal love. Lady Carew did not seem, however, to wish to dwell on such topics. "She had learnt," she said, "to enjoy the good things

allotted her as compensation for others that had been denied." And, amongst those good things, she reckoned the pleasure of having Katherine with her, and of heaping upon her every gratification her position enabled her to bestow. She seemed to know, as if by inspiration, what would suit her friend Kate; nothing was ever a difficulty; the "music room" was set apart for her exclusive use, and the closing of the folding doors, during the forenoon, made good the promise of rendering the apartment as "secure from intrusion as the Wyngate school-room." To this undisturbed retreat it was agreed that Katherine should repair every morning, for the purpose of receiving instructions in drawing and singing, to which pursuits were shortly after added "conversation lessons" in Italian, from a lady whose accomplishments induced Lady Carew to propose the thing as an opportunity too valuable to be missed.

The studies and the sight-seeing began together, and a party to the Français was already arranged. The business of shopping was carried on daily; visitors, both French and English, dropped in occasionally of an evening; and, on the sixth day after her arrival, Katherine declared "that she had seen more people than in six years at Wyngate!" Amongst the visitors was the owner of the watch, Cecilia's brother. It was given over to him in perfect preservation; he thanked Miss Desborough, courteously, for the care she had taken of it; expressed the proper degree of pleasure at

meeting a member of a family his sister was so intimate with; in short, he said and did everything that a well-bred gentleman should say and do on such an occasion. Nevertheless, had Mrs. Tynedale been by, her castle would have received a fatal blow; for no observant eye could have failed to detect the fact that neither the introduction to his sister's young friend, nor the reception of his favourite watch from her hands, awakened in Oswald Langton's breast the slightest degree of interest for the bringer. Neither did he excite any in hers; for, though she saw he was well-looking; nay, even handsome; though his address was good, and his countenance intelligent, she was—it would have taken a long while to explain why—disappointed in him. Disappointed in him, that is, as Cecilia's brother; for, in the mere light of a member of general society, she perceived that he usually was, and always could be, what commonly passes for an "agreeable man." She had never heard any high-flown description of him from his sister, had not formed any definite idea of what he was or ought to be; but still he proved so totally different from what she would have expected, however vaguely, in Cecilia Langton's favourite brother, that the feeling of disappointment remained with her. She had purposely delayed writing to Cecilia, till she could mention the restoration of the watch; and the consciousness of not being extremely pleased with its owner, rather hampered her in the composition of her letter.

She could not say, "Your brother is so like you!" seeing that no further resemblance existed between them than that of both having blue eyes; she would have begun with, "Though your brother is unlike you in features, yet his countenance and turn of thought reminded me of you;" but that phrase was equally inapplicable for any letter-writer who retained a prejudice for fact over fiction; and, as to saying, "Your brother and I had a long talk about you," that was out of the question, also; because, (though, as time went on, Kate continued to see him occasionally), he never, after his first introduction, even alluded to her intimacy with his sister. That he corresponded with her she knew, through Cecilia herself; but it seemed as if, having that means of knowing all he cared to know about his home and his relations, he thought it superfluous to ask a third person "if she had heard from Shadworth since her arrival in Paris?" Altogether, her epistle to Cecilia took her a very unusual time; especially as the renewal of her old affection for Lady Carew made her extremely desirous of unsaying much that she had, as she now considered, unjustly accused her of.

We have all, in our day, experienced the difficulty of disproving our own assertions, especially when, though convinced ourselves of our mistake, we have nothing to urge in proof of that conviction but a feeling, often founded on circumstances too slight to weigh with others. Katherine was, accordingly, dissatisfied with *her* attempts.

She succeeded better, however, when she took up what, as she said, there could be no doubt about, Isabella's present conduct, and the admirable temper and judgment she showed in the difficult position of a "young and beautiful woman united to age and ugliness; of a noble-minded being chained to one so utterly ignoble." "Her manner towards him when present, and in speaking of him when absent, is," said Katherine, "beyond all praise; for, though she never makes any hypocritical professions, either to or about him, she also never appears to perceive what he had better have left undone or unsaid, and never fails to bring forward anything that is, or may be made to seem, amiable in him." There were other points on which Katherine could, if she would, have dilated; but she had more than once heard the remark "that there is a kind of commendation which suggests the idea that some may find fault;" and she abstained from any allusion to that part of her friend's position, which she herself felt to be what is commonly called "dangerous." Even these few days had shewn Katherine that, in spite of the so-called "quiet life" that her hostess was at present leading, there were those among her numerous acquaintance, who were only waiting for an encouraging look from "the fair Carew" to be transformed from "admirers" into worshippers, and rivals for the triumph of awakening a corresponding feeling in one whose affections could not be supposed, by any reasoning being, to be centered

in her husband. *He* thought it a matter of course that his wife should be "admired;" and so evidently considered this kind of homage as a tribute to his own taste, as, if possible, to increase Katherine's disgust and contempt for him, and to make her feel "that if Isabella were not Isabella," such views on his part might lead to peril. But *Isabella* was safe! she had loved passionately, deeply; her love had been trifled with—scorned; it had burnt itself out; her heart was seared; others might love her, but she was proof against the infection. ("She knew *that* of herself," she said, "when she married.") She did not, probably, as yet suspect how sorely the unworthy possessor of her charms was envied by the handsome and witty Vicomte de Neyrac; but the discovery (if ever made) would bring about no struggle between duty and inclination; the amount of happiness—of peace rather—which Isabella's sense and resignation had procured her, could not be undermined by that or any similar trial; and, in spite of much that would have disturbed her concerning one less completely "armed at all points," for her own friend Katherine felt entire security.

And on what foundation, it may be asked, did Sir Edward ground the like security? Not, certainly, on any belief in that sentimental theory of his wife's, which Katherine was willing to subscribe to, "of first loves being only ones;" not in any over-strong delusion respecting her feelings for himself; nor yet in any exalted opinion of

woman's virtue (which it was easy to see he held very cheap) but simply and solely on this : he was Sir Edward Carew, of Moreleigh Abbey, with as steady a hand—in spite of all the dinners he had eaten since—and as correct an eye as when he, five and twenty years before, shot the right arm of the offending Dutchman, at the precise point he had previously boasted he should hit. He did not, of course, state this in plain terms, as regarded himself and his own household; but it peeped out so frequently when he was discussing those of his neighbours, with such an air of conscious superiority in his coarse face, that Katherine sometimes wished that he had, indeed, such a wife as *they* deserve who think a woman's honour best preserved by something equivalent to the notice of "Steel traps and spring guns set here."

"It was weak," Katherine repeated to herself, day after day, "it was very weak of Isabella to let herself be drawn into a union with anything so degraded! But weakness is a venial sin; and I see, that at the time I was accusing her of having thrown aside all the disinterestedness she had been used to profess, she was, in fact, only acting up to one of those notions of hers, which mamma would call 'high-flown,' that when true happiness is out of the question, all that is left is to resign self, and seek satisfaction in giving it to those whose natural claims upon our obedience are strong, and who, however mistakenly, have our good at heart.

We have all 'sat in judgment' on Isabella; which of us, in her place, could so well, and so cheerfully, stand the ever-recurring trials inseparable from the lot of one who, through whatever fate, *is* the wife of that hateful man?"

CHAPTER IX.

LADY Carew had told Katherine she might trust to her, and to Madame de Villarceau, for being shewn "all that a stranger in Paris ought to see." This promise was faithfully kept, though the chief share in its performance fell upon the elder lady, who, it must be said, was one of those persons whom no amount of standing fatigues, and was, therefore, perfectly fitted, by constitution as by good nature, to chaperon her young countrywoman on sight-seeing expeditions, which, as Isabella frequently said, would have utterly worn *her* out, had she often attempted them. Miss Desborough found a pleasant companion in the late Mrs. Walpole's cotemporary; and as Mr. de Villarceau, now en retraite, had not his time taken up by any particular engagements, he was, as he expressed it, "toujours disponible," and ready to accompany his wife and "la charmante étrangère" wherever the escort of a gentleman was required. The Villarceaux were a very agreeable pair, and, moreover, one that might be quoted as an exception to the

general rule of the unhappiness of marriages contracted between Englishwomen and foreigners. The gentleman's family had spent the long years of the revolutionary war in England; while he, the eldest son, detained in France by dangerous illness when the rest fled for their lives, remained under the care of the kind friends who had thus sheltered him, till, entering Napoleon's army, he followed its fortunes through some fifteen years of campaigning, the retreat from Moscow included. Peace, which deprived him of his hopes of becoming a "Maréchal de France," restored his surviving relations to their country, and also made him acquainted with a Mr. and Mrs. Milman and their daughter, who had shewn them great kindness during their adversity. This acquaintance had no immediate result; but, when the death of both her parents had left Miss Milman in a situation which was at once isolated and independent, she accepted the proposals of the somewhat weather-beaten, but gentleman-like and agreeable colonel, who, on his part, thought himself lucky in obtaining, without the sacrifice of a misalliance, a well-looking, and, according to his views, well-endowed wife. Their tempers were good, their expectations moderate, and neither had yet repented of the step they had taken; which, after the wear and tear of twenty years' wedlock, is something to be said, even for couples unencumbered by that mighty element of discord involved in a difference of nationality. Mr. de Villarceau, like the rest of his countrymen, loved

society; she loved it too, and had worldly wisdom enough to take that society as she found it, and never to trouble herself, or others, by judging it according to the standard of a different people, and a different place. She continued to think that she had, on the whole, judged wisely in giving herself the position she occupied, and professed that opinion in rather a matter-of-fact way, as much removed from the ecstatic expressions frequently heard from the lips of those brides who have married foreigners "in spite of their relations," as from the equally passionate regrets of their native land, uttered by the same ladies, when disenchanted with the life on which they had as ignorantly as obstinately entered. Katherine liked her; for there was something very good-natured, kind even, in her readiness to take trouble for the sake of the young girl whom she only knew as Lady Carew's guest; and it amused her, also, to converse freely with one who was, so to speak, both French and English. The enthusiastic warmth of nineteen was, however, sometimes checked—nay, chilled—by the long-headed experience of forty-five, in a manner by which Katherine was always, momentarily, provoked. Momentarily—that is, when it merely concerned indifferent things or people; but it was a stronger irritation she felt, when this or that trifle made her suspect Madame de Villarceau of not choosing to look beyond the general opinion "that Lady Carew's cheerfulness was too thoroughly genuine,

her satisfaction with her position too evident, to betoken much annoyance at the shortcomings of the husband, who had bestowed it on her."

"I know people say so," said Katherine, one morning, to her indefatigable chaperon, who, after having escorted her on an early visit to the Louvre Galleries, was resting herself in the music-room, where all things were in readiness for the Italian lesson soon to begin. "I know people say so; but those who do, cannot know her as I do."

"No," replied Madame de Villarceau, "neither can I; since, if you had not assured me of the contrary, I, too, should have doubted Isabella's sensitiveness on these points. She has always seemed to me to feel about Sir Edward, precisely as you would about an unsightly piece of furniture in your drawing-room; you would put it out of your way if you could; but, if it is too heavy to be moved, you forget its existence, except just when you knock up against it. A good deal of that manner is assumed, I daresay; and, if she is not as contented as I thought her, I can assure you I thoroughly appreciate the good sense she shows in keeping it to herself." So saying, Madame de Villarceau kissed her young friend on both cheeks, after the fashion of her adopted country, and took her leave.

Katherine was very angry; for, though this speech had been politely worded, the manner of it convinced her that her own assertions went for nothing, and that the selfish, superficially-judging

world was still supposed to understand Isabella better than she, her intimate friend, did.

It was not very reasonable, on Katherine's part, to feel offended with Madame de Villarceau for opinions much more mildly put forth than her own had been up to the period of her somewhat recent "conversion." But converts are apt to be over zealous; and Katherine remained unreasonable, till the arrival of the Signora Moriani put a stop to her reflections.

There certainly did not seem much chance of Katherine's being "made a fool of" in the sense Mr. Oakly inwardly gave to his valedictory address; that is, she was by no means "surrounded by admirers," whether "dangerous" or otherwise. Admired, in the simple acceptation of the word, she undoubtedly was, by most of those who met her at the Carews', whether English or French; and by some, among the latter, Madame de Villarceau had already been questioned as to the number of "mille francs" of which that young lady's portion might be expected to consist, and also as to the probability of the said portion being bestowed upon a foreign suitor. But, as Madame de Villarceau invariably and decidedly replied to all inquiries "Qu'on ne marierait pas Mademoiselle Desborough avec un étranger," it was soon understood that "no business could be done in that quarter," and no further pursuit was attempted; while, amongst the English, no one, as yet, had either fallen in love on short notice, or found it

necessary, from the state of his private affairs, to feign that condition. It was fortunate for Katherine's power of being pleased with what was around her, that she had not conceived any of those exaggerated notions of the sudden passions she was necessarily to inspire, which those who have lived the most secluded lives are often the most apt to form. She did not fancy herself "neglected," because no such passion had as yet been formally declared, and was, therefore, at leisure to be quietly amused with the variety of persons she saw, and the novelty of much that her present situation brought before her. The complimentary phrases of the French gentlemen, and the exceedingly deferential tone in which they invariably pronounced that long word "Mademoiselle," as a preface or an adjunct to everything they addressed to her, struck her, at first, as something singular; but then, on the other hand, she thought them very agreeable, inasmuch as they found all the conversation for her, and never seemed afflicted with the disease of having "nothing to say." It was evident, however, even from the very care with which they set about the business of entertaining her, that they did not expect "Mademoiselle's" range of ideas to be a particularly wide one; and neither among them, nor among her own countrymen, had Katherine met with one in whose favour she could have retracted the ill-timed praise she had once bestowed on Lewis Markham, namely, "that he was the only

man who ever addressed her as a reasoning and educated being." Thus, though no "beau ideal" had appeared, and no "remarkable adventure" seemed the least likely to occur, the mixture of sight-seeing, shopping, and study in the day-time, with occasional visits in the evenings, and the ever renewed pleasure of talking over all things with the friend who was "restored" to her, rendered Katherine what she would have called "too happy," had it not been for Sir Edward *in* the house, and Robert Hazlewood out of it. He, even as she had been led to expect on the evening of her arrival, had come over to "make acquaintance with Mr. Waterfield;" and though too shy to prove a very obtrusive admirer (he was luckily in great awe of Lady Carew), he had a provoking knack of discovering to what sights Katherine was bound in the day, and to what theatres at night. Then, too, no discouragement could break him of the habit—acquired in childish days—of addressing her in all companies as "Kate," a proceeding which invariably brought a flush of annoyance into her cheek, thereby never failing to attract the notice of her other tormentor, Sir Edward. Not that the old gentleman, any more than the young one, had, in the abstract, an intention to torment, but, like all other dull people, he loved a standing joke; and having derived much satisfaction from witnessing Kate's blushes, as he day after day repeated to each visitor the story of her surprise the morning after her arrival, at waking to see herself in the looking-

glass, he was not sorry to be provided with another engine for throwing his young guest into the confusion which heightened her colour, and added to the lustre of her large grey eyes.

"It is very ungrateful of you to dislike him so much," said Madame de Villarceau to Katherine. "You can't think how much more amiable you have made him; and it was only yesterday he was telling me how 'he *had* thought it rather a sacrifice to take on these apartments for two months, just because Isabella insisted that it would be so much pleasanter for her friend to visit her here than at Moreleigh Abbey; but that now he knew Miss Desborough, and saw how she was enjoying herself, he was quite glad he had consented.'"

"Oh!" exclaimed Katherine, "I am sorry Isabella did that! She meant it kindly, but if I had known . . . . ."

"You would not have come!" interrupted Madame de Villarceau, "and would have punished yourself and Isabella, and, as you see, poor old Sir Edward into the bargain. Don't afflict yourself about it, my dear child! If Isabella put your name forward with her lord and master, it was probably because—as you have had ample means of perceiving—when one means will not avail, another must be tried. She wished to stay here—wished at the same time to see you—and, if she urged it a little for your sake, there is no harm done; especially when it is plain enough that the old gentleman cannot be happier anywhere than

in 'Le Paradis des gourmands.' You may depend upon it, my dear, Sir Edward made no sacrifice, though he certainly used the words; it is not his way. He had a sulky fit about five weeks ago—said 'Paris did not agree with him' (a slight touch of indigestion, I suspect, though he is not so often punished in that fashion as he deserves)—and, while it was on him, he spoke of leaving France, and had to be talked out of it. I really only told it you, that you might know how fully he 'appreciatès Lady Carew's lovely friend.'"

There was something so comical in the exact mimicry of Sir Edward's pompous tone, with which Madame de Villarceau concluded, that Katherine laughed heartily, promised never to let Isabella know that the conjugal discussion preceding her own invitation had been repeated to her, and agreed that Sir Edward's remaining two months longer in Paris could not be considered in the light of a "sacrifice." Prejudice apart, there was no denying that he was, in his way, good-naturedly disposed towards Katherine. He would not have given up an "entremêts" at his own table, nor the "spécialité" of a favourite restaurant for her sake; but, short of *such* sacrifices, he cordially wished to promote both her satisfaction and her interest, according to his own views of the same. But these views of her "interests" he could not keep to himself; and whenever he favoured her, as he often did, with a mixture of old-fashioned compliments and patronising com-

mendation of his own good taste in discovering her merits, he was sure to end by a very plain expression of his regret that she had not had "the advantage" of being with him and his wife earlier, when such and such persons, whose rent-rolls he always estimated to a farthing, were still in Paris.

"You really seem to forget, Sir Edward, that Katherine came here to see *me*," said Lady Carew, one morning, in a tone in which her guest for the first time detected a trace of irritation. "I do hope and suppose she is also glad to see what Paris can show her at the same time, but you have no right to think we none of us can enjoy anything but that sort of whirl, in which I was foolish enough to wear myself out last winter. Rather amusing for once—but not worth the strength it takes out of one!"

"Very well for you, Isabella; very well indeed!" answered he, nodding complacently; "but you will recollect—you will recollect—that young ladies—"

"Are not always and invariably thinking of themselves as such!" interrupted Lady Carew, as she saw the colour rising in her friend's cheek.

"No, no," returned Sir Edward, bowing to Miss Desborough with a look he meant to be half knowing, half deferential; "but I may be allowed, for the sake of friends I greatly esteem, to regret the late arrival of such a young lady as I see before me!"

Having delivered himself of this flattering speech, Sir Edward departed, leaving the object of it in

some confusion, and his wife deprived for the moment of that wonderful command of countenance, which, in general, would have led a bystander to believe that she literally neither heard nor understood her husband's ill-timed remarks. The sort of "set-down" Sir Edward received, had just so much effect as to prevent him, for a while at least, from addressing his lamentations directly to Katherine herself; though she suspected, from some fag ends of conversation she came in upon at odd times, that he still now and then gave her hostess the benefit of his opinions. It happened, too, that after the complete lull which generally follows the conclusion of the Paris season, some public-spirited individuals, both French and English, were moved, either by charity to their neighbours, or the necessity of having "something going on," to give a few evening parties. They were not balls, though at one or two of them dancing was the chief purpose of the assembly; and Kate Desborough enjoyed them, as she did everything else, thoroughly and heartily, while Lady Carew, the most charming of chaperons, appeared to delight in the office. "I wish," she said, one night, as they were driving home, "*I do* wish I had earlier devised the 'Open Sesame' that should give you freedom to cross the Channel! My slowness at inventing ways and means has deprived me of a great pleasure; for," continued she, "it would have been such a surpassing pleasure to see you, night after night, 'La reine du bal!' And then you have strength to enjoy

those sorts of entertainments without paying for them as I do! *I*, you see, am grown unfit for anything but just the life we are now leading, and am really forced to admit, every night that you and Sir Edward go to the play, how much good it does me to free myself from all the claims of society, by the simple announcement 'que Madame n'est pas visible.' I certainly have grown very fond of being quiet lately. What makes you smile, Kate? Do you think my principles and my practice at variance, because you heard me say this morning that I *must* fix a day for a 'Réception'? I hate it, I assure you; but it's a duty I can't put off much longer."

"I was only thinking that I suppose you and I call the same things by very different names, for *I* never spent such a gay month in my life! I am only afraid of its spoiling me! What shall I think of Wyngate, when I go home?"

"Oh, my dear child, don't talk of going home! why should you? They don't half appreciate their jewel there—I have it, and I mean to keep it for a long, long while!"

CHAPTER X.

MRS. OAKLY'S letters, which arrived with exemplary punctuality on each succeeding Wednesday, were not precisely calculated to diminish her daughter's dread of finding Wyngate "duller than ever." She possessed, in its fullest amount, the habit of invariably imparting to her correspondent the uninteresting, rather than the interesting family details, and of asking exactly those questions which are rather a hindrance than a help to the unfortunate being doomed to answer such effusions. Annie Oakly sometimes wrote; but her communications, though they might have been amusing in their way, had they been signed, sealed and directed in the schoolroom, were invariably inserted in the same large sheet upon which her mother intended afterwards to indite her own letter, and the result was that poor little Annie's epistles were as unlike herself as possible; that is, cold and stiff, besides being more—instead of less—childish than is usual at twelve years of age. Her sister was not slow at discerning the cause of these defects; but it was irremediable; and the "home correspondence" was not of a nature to brighten the prospect of

re-entering the family circle. That prospect was still four weeks off, however—Lady Carew was always saying it must be farther still—and Katherine found small difficulty in banishing thoughts of the future, while the present was, in one way or another, so agreeable.

The little dinner-parties to which Sir Edward every now and then invited a select few, whom he judged capable of appreciating the viands set before them, would not in themselves have been very entertaining; but Lady Carew generally contrived that they should include one or two individuals who did not precisely belong to the noble guild of those who "live to eat," and certainly live for nothing else. Sir Edward's French was fluent, and uncommonly correct; so that he had none of that disagreeable sensation of being tongue-tied, when out of the presence of his countrymen, which might otherwise have limited his hospitality to them, and them only. Whether he had acquired this accomplishment in childhood, or whether he had, on reaching years of discretion, studied hard for the express purpose of better communicating with cooks and restaurateurs, Miss Desborough could not determine; but so it was; and a naturalist might have profited greatly by the opportunities afforded at Sir Edward's table, for examining into the varieties of the genus "Gourmand," as found, and formed by education, in France and England. Mr. de Villarceau was a useful as well as frequent guest at these parties,

for, though he never spoke but in his native tongue, he understood English thoroughly, and had a great knack at interpreting the most incomprehensible jargon meant to pass for French. Oswald Langton, too—that brother so unlike his sister!—was even better fitted than Mr. de Villarceau for "making things go off," since he, like Sir Edward, might almost be considered as "double-tongued."

Not so Mr. de Neyrac; but then he possessed other recommendations. He was, or appeared, quite as learned on the subject of cooking as his host; and moreover, though it was plain to Katherine that he came more for the sake of the fair lady than the good dinner, he could—if the seat by the fair lady were not to be had—resign himself with a very good grace to that part of the duty of "un homme à bonnes fortunes" so much insisted on by Anthony Hamilton, namely, "de faire la cour au mari."

There are moralists who tell us, "that no duty is without its reward;" and it is possible that Mr. de Neyrac may have sometimes found his, in the communications of the old epicure, whose egregious vanity, and love of importance, rendered him an easy prey to his perfidious questioner, who, as Miss Desborough one evening perceived, was drawing from him the whole history of "Mynheer Van Dunk." Sir Edward's account of his own prowess terminated, on this occasion, with a sort of "lecture" on the shades of difference between the French and English "codes of honour," to

which Mr. de Neyrac listened with as grave a look as would have befitted the inquirer at some sacred oracle; while Katherine sat, apparently attending to the description of the interior of an Arab tent, (as extracted from Mr. Thornhill the traveller,) but wishing all the while, that her fluent host knew no more of the language in which he was making himself ridiculous, than did Robert Hazlewood.

He was never admitted to these solemn feasts; he was not cook enough for Sir Edward, nor agreeable enough for his wife; and Katherine was glad that nothing tempted them to bestow that amount of encouragement, on an admirer of whom she was heartily ashamed. She was more ashamed, if the truth must be spoken, of his attentions, and of the long-standing intimacy between their families, than was strictly reasonable, and she thought it a heavy trial—many a one twice her age has thought so too—to be obliged, by the consideration due to old neighbours, to accept even a small portion of the civilities pressed upon her, by people who had the misfortune of being thought ridiculous by her intimate friend. Why Lady Carew had ever given herself the trouble of criticizing them so sarcastically, it would be hard to say; for, though the son was no doubt foolish enough, neither the mother nor the daughter, nor the daughter's intended husband, presented any of those striking features of absurdity, which positively invite satire. They were only rather dull, rather stiff, rather given

to make set speeches, and wholly uninteresting. It may be fairly supposed, therefore, that Lady Carew had, at some idle moment, wanted a butt, and that the Hazlewood party, having been once established as such, "retained the situation." Somebody has made the remark that, "a fine lady must always have a butt;" and though in truth it is a much more common requirement than "somebody's" remark implies, there is no doubt that the habit of talking over the Hazlewoods at every spare moment, was often a great resource, and that those whose ideas were in danger of stagnating, could always revive sufficiently, to join in a chorus of ridicule against them and all their doings.

It was on the eve of the day fixed for the Carews' "Réception," between luncheon and driving time, that just such a chorus was being poured forth by the united voices of Mr. de Villarceau, Oswald Langton, and the lady of the house, assisted by a young Englishman, of the name of Shelburne. The mother was consequential, the daughter affected, the son a fool, the son-in-law elect a prig; so much was positive; for the four culprits were there, in Paris, to be seen as large as life; but it was also gratuitously supposed that the father, who remained in England looking after his acres, must be a curmudgeon, out of whose way the others were glad to escape, and that the younger girls in the school-room must equally be progressing through every stage, natural and artificial, to the pitch of

sublimated common place, of which the now "engaged" Miss Hazlewood had turned out so perfect a specimen. These points had just been settled, when Miss Desborough entered the room; but though her appearance, and the exchange of greetings consequent upon it, certainly interrupted the all-engrossing discussion for a few seconds, the subject was by no means abandoned.

"What amuses me most," said Lady Carew, "is the way they are always trying hard to do some things after the most approved French fashion; while, as regards some others, they strive so eagerly to enter their defiant protest in testification of 'being English.'"

"With all the regular appurtenance of 'English feeling,' which some people think it necessary to carry about with them wherever they go," observed Langton.

Mr. de Villarceau asked, with a smile, "If *he* disapproved of the feeling in question?"

"Far from it—quite the contrary. I wish all my friends were as thoroughly imbued with it as Miss Hazlewood says *she* is; but, if it were such an overpowering sentiment in me, as it is in some folks one meets all over the Continent, why, I should stay at home."

"There is a certain amount of nonsense about them," said young Shelburne—who, having abused them till he was tired, was now beginning to think of a little justice—"there is that, undoubtedly; but I must say Mrs. Hazlewood is

good-natured—very; at least, I have always found her so."

"Ah je le crois bien!" said Mr. de Villarceau, who proceeded to hint that the mamma of "une demoiselle à marier" was always sure to display a certain kind of good nature.

"Not to 'scorpions' like me," replied Shelburne, laughing. "*We* don't always find mammas so obliging as Mrs. Hazlewood was to me this winter; so obliging and so successful, too, in getting me cards for everything I wanted to be taken to, without over much of a fuss."

"Yes, I believe she generally *is* good-natured about that sort of thing," said Lady Carew; "good-natured in a patronizing kind of way. Successful she certainly was not, in the one and only matter in which *I* ever applied to her for assistance. You know how intimate she is with Mrs. Charlemont, and how she never meets you without telling you all the names of all the literary personages at her last 'delightful soirée.' She never succeeded, however, in making me wish to go to one of them, till the other day I heard, that at the next, Giacinta Santi, the improvising girl, is going to be so condescending as to exhibit her talents. Now, as I also heard that the audience—the feminine part of it at least—was to be limited to those whose Italian scholarship would enable them to appreciate the promised treat, it was easy to see that the party would be so much more

select than numerous, that there would be no great favour conferred in obtaining leave for Kate and me to occupy two of Mrs. Charlemont's chairs on Wednesday. The commission was willingly undertaken, and I was expecting the cards, as a matter of course, when, behold, instead of them, appears Mrs. Hazlewoood, 'regretting' and 'apologizing,' and 'so sorry she had not been aware of it before;' but 'as only a small number of persons could hear and see Giacinta well, and as that number was already complete, invitations could not be extended farther.' Now I really believe the good woman was sorry,—if it were only for missing the satisfaction of introducing us,—but though I did make all manner of civil speeches, and said 'how obliged I was, notwithstanding,' I saw directly that she had bungled the business by just humbly asking permission 'to bring two friends;' whereas, if she had named us (especially if she had made a proper use of Kate's Italian studies), the cards would, I doubt not, have been forthcoming in a moment. For how on earth was Mrs. Charlemont to know that Mrs. Hazlewood's 'two friends' were not those ridiculous women, Mrs. Battersby and her daughter?"

Every one laughed at the notion of Lady Carew and Miss Desborough being possibly supposed to be the Battersbys, while Mr. de Villarceau inveighed bitterly against the ambassadress who had thus cleverly deprived all her friends of a

pleasure, since Mrs. Charlemont, he was positive, "aurait été enchantée de faire la connaissance de ces dames—celà va sans dire!"

"And more than that," said Shelburne, "people *do* say, for all this talk about 'select circles,' that the Corinne now exhibiting is never what she calls 'fully inspired' without a pretty dense crowd of listeners."

"If she's inspired at all, crowd or no crowd," observed Langton, "it's more than has been the case with any of her trade *I* ever was doomed to listen to!"

"Still, I should like to hear one of them exceedingly," said Miss Desborough.

"Yes, just as you would like to hear the singing mouse, or the talking fish," returned Langton.

"C'est que Mademoiselle est bien jeune," said Mr. de Villarceau, excusingly, "et il y a si peu de temps qu'elle est à Paris."

"Yes; youth is a good thing while it lasts; and novelty is the best gilder of everything that goes by the name of pleasure, whether in Paris or elsewhere," rejoined Langton, almost sarcastically; "for which reason I consider Mrs. Charlemont to have had a considerable loss (whether through her own or Mrs. Hazlewood's stupidity) in missing a guest, whose delightful readiness to be pleased and impressed, would render her, independently of other merits, an uncommon acquisition at a conversazione."

"C'est que cette dame Hazlewood n'aura pas sû

comment s'y prendre," remarked Villarceau. "But then," proceeded he, "what could be expected from so ignorant a woman? from one who was so void of common sense as not to be aware of the first conditions required for making society pleasant? Would the present company believe that she wanted to prohibit cards at her parties? Had forbidden the tables to be set out before twelve at her last 'soirée dansante?' So," continued the old gentleman, "what do you think that impudent little dog, Montigny, did? Why, went up to her, watch in hand,—as the clock struck—saying he was come to claim his just rights!"

"Bravo, Montigny!" cried Langton with a laugh; "I would have given something to have seen Mrs. Hazlewood's face on the occasion!"

"Well, I'm sure Mrs. Hazlewood was right, if she could, to keep her company from cards, when they might be better employed," said Miss Desborough.

"In dancing, you mean?" asked Langton, gravely.

"Yes, in dancing," answered she, coloring from an undefined feeling that she was being covertly ridiculed.

"The employment has the advantage of your partaking in, and therefore approving of it, Miss Desborough; but if ever you should survive the disposition to find felicity in rapid motion to the sound of fiddles and cornopeans, you may have more indulgence for those who find theirs round a

green table, unless you take to excommunicating both tastes."

"I don't know how that may be," returned Katherine, in an indifferent tone; "but I know I have from childhood looked on a card as the emblem of all that is wearisome; and what I have seen in society, since I have grown up, has not corrected my old impression."

"I daresay not," said Langton, "for the very reason I was suggesting. But of course Mrs. Hazlewood has a right to make, for her own assemblies, such bye-laws as she chooses, if she can but get them observed; which end, so far as the preference of dancing to cards goes, I should expect to be more easily attained, if she thought more of the attractions, and less of the visiting-lists, of the ladies on whom she reckons for converting young men from whist to waltzing."

"Is she so particular?" asked Shelburne.

"Why, I am not in her confidence; so I'm just repeating what some one gave me as the explanation of the awful preponderance of plain faces at her last soirée; but I don't vouch for the cause," added he, smiling, "I know the actual fact was lamentably self-evident."

"Je vous dis qu'elle est par trop bête!" exclaimed Mr. de Villarceau, who proceeded to lament that his wife's acquaintance with Mrs. Charlemont was of too recent a date for her to be able to set matters to rights *now*, though he felt

sure that, "had she been employed at first, the misunderstanding would never have arisen."

"Oh," said Lady Carew, "my regret is very slight; indeed, it was not on my own account I wished for it at all; and now it has turned out that Wednesday is the only evening on which Rachel is to appear in Roxane before leaving Paris, and the Fieldings have asked Kate to join the party in their box, I don't think *she* regrets it either. It is the only one of Rachel's great parts in which she has not yet seen her; whenever it has been acted, there has always been something in the way; and, as I am forbidden to go myself (the atmosphere of a theatre really kills me!) and as Sir Edward can't get over his antipathy to tragedies, I think myself very fortunate in being able to procure her this long-looked-for pleasure through the Fieldings."

Some conversation ensued upon the comparative merits of the great actress's performances, in the course of which Lady Carew and Mr. Shelburne gave the palm to "Camille," while Mr. de Villarceau and Oswald Langton were inclined to think that her representation of the imperious mistress of the Harem, was—if not so interesting—more thoroughly equal with itself.

"Well," observed Mr. de Villarceau, "we are two against two; I shall come here on Thursday, and then 'Mademoiselle' will give us *her* opinion." He rose as he spoke, saying "he had promised to

fetch his niece, Madame de Rosmond, from the Countess Korinski's, so must no longer linger pleasantly where he was, at the risk of keeping her waiting."

"I did not know," observed Mr. Shelburne, "that Madame de Korinski was returned from the country."

"Yes, she was to be back from her Norman friend's château yesterday," replied Lady Carew, "and I half expected to have seen her this morning; it seems a long time since we have met her any where, does it not? She went out of town just before Kate arrived."

"I was not aware you had a German friend here," said Miss Desborough.

"She's not German," returned Langton, bluntly.

"Well, then, Hungarian or Bohemian."

"I rather think the Herr Graf Korinski belongs to the last-named nationality," continued her informant; "but *she* is English."

"And a great friend of mine," added Lady Carew.

"Korinski," repeated Katherine, musingly; and while her hostess, (whose carriage had been just announced,) was receiving Mr. de Villarceau's last words, she asked Mr. Shelburne, whether it were possible that their mutual acquaintances, the Selwyns, could have met this lady in London the preceding year?

"Quite possible," replied he; "for I heard her say, not long ago, that she had been there last season, and 'hated it worse than ever;' for which,"

added he, in a half muttered tone, "I suppose she had her own very sufficient reasons."

The announcement that Lady Carew's carriage was waiting, had the effect of reminding both the Englishmen that it was time to take leave; and in a few minutes the two ladies were seated side by side in a britschka, whirling rapidly along the Boulevards.

CHAPTER XI.

"How hard I find it to believe Mr. Langton is his own sister's brother!" exclaimed Katherine.

"I have seen her—just seen her—at your mother's house, years ago," answered Lady Carew; "but not enough to remember any characteristics of hers that may contrast with his. You, I conclude, see the lack of resemblance in a light somewhat disadvantageous to him."

"He is what is commonly thought agreeable, I am aware," replied Katherine, "and—to a certain extent—one can always get on with him; but still I do not feel a bit better acquainted with him than the first time we met; and I confess I do not *like* the sort of polite indifference, that never varies from the style of talk and demeanour which may be suitably adopted towards an utter stranger."

"Langton is a man of the world," observed Lady Carew, "and as such, possibly finds that unvarying demeanour convenient, as a general way of getting over ground; and I suppose it is successful, for most people like his company."

"Yes, I see they do," replied Miss Desborough; "and it would be great exaggeration to say, 'I *dis*like

him;' only he is not as pleasing as I should have expected to find a man so well gifted as to appearance, understanding, and information; but I really believe, Isabella," proceeded she, smiling, "that if he were not Cecilia's brother, I should like him better, just from not fancying there was any reason for liking him *more* than any one else."

"I believe I understand what you feel," returned Lady Carew, who was silent for a few minutes, and then said, "You seem very fond—enthusiastically fond—of this Miss Langton, whom I imagined to be rather your mother's friend than yours; is she not a good deal nearer Mrs. Oakly in age?"

"She is exactly between our ages—nine years younger than mamma, nine years older than I. She always noticed me, even when I was a little child, and during the last two or three years it has almost seemed . . . ."

"As if she had more to say to her young friend than to her old one?" asked Lady Carew, with a smile.

"I don't know if she has more, only of a different kind," replied Katherine; "for she is a sort of person who is able to interest herself in whatever interests the people she cares for, even when it is of a nature you would not think the least likely to excite her sympathy."

"Then you suppose she sympathizes with her brothers?" inquired Lady Carew.

"She must, if they are as fond of her as Lewis Markham says. *I*, of course, having never known

any of them, or been at Shadworth myself, can only give you his report."

"She led a very secluded life, I think," observed Lady Carew, "at least I remember your telling me something of the sort; so I suppose she never had much chance of being anything but Cecilia Langton to the end of the chapter; an exterior that is merely pleasing so seldom attracts attention in retirement. Real beauty is required for *that!*"

"Ah, about that kind of things, I fancy her 'older friend' could tell you more than I; she has never come upon them with me! I do remember hearing mamma say to Mrs. Tynedale, what a pity it was Cecilia had not chosen to marry somebody (she did not mention his name), and Mrs. Tynedale's answering, that she couldn't wish her to be so thrown away; but I only *know* that her father's circumstances, and her father's fancies, prevented her ever having much of what Mr. Oakly calls 'young lady life;' and now she always assumes herself to be an old maid, though she does not look the least like one's notion of the thing!"

"At eight and twenty she *is* an old maid, so I think she calls herself by the right name," said Lady Carew, in a decisive tone, which, as the opinion expressed happened to concern Cecilia, a little jarred upon her friend's feelings. "She must be an unusually pleasing specimen, though," continued Lady Carew. "And it is Oswald," proceeded she, after a pause, "the one that is here, who is her favourite brother?"

"So Lewis Markham tells me; and though she does not talk much about herself or her family, little things that have dropped from her now and then, make me sure he is right. Still it is a thing that surprises me whenever I think of it; for though he seems clever—and I believe you and most people find him agreeable—I should never have supposed he could have been congenial to her."

"Perhaps she likes him for being uncongenial, my dear creature!" returned Lady Carew, with a smile. "You and he," she continued, "are, I perceive, decidedly not sympathetic; though I believe you might have grown more so, if you had been, as I was for some time this winter, in the habit of meeting him wherever you went, so as to have always some thing, or person, to exchange ideas about. He is, as I have said before, a thorough man of the world, who won't go deeper than he sees fit into any subject, and, I should think, must be every way a contrast to his sister; but yet he is, for all that, a very pleasant companion when he chooses."

"Perhaps," said Katherine, "it is not his way to make himself such to young ladies; I see that many people are afraid of them."

"It would be no great wonder if some *were* afraid of one who has so little patience with dull men, and shows such imperial haughtiness to forward men, as certain friends of mine!" rejoined Lady Carew, with an arch look at Kate; "but I

can't say I think Langton is given to that kind of fear."

"It wasn't that kind I was thinking of," said Miss Desborough, who was interrupted in her definition of the precise sort of timidity which she ascribed to Mr. Oswald Langton, by observing the sudden nod and smile of pleased recognition, exchanged between Lady Carew and a little dark woman, with sparkling black eyes, who passed quickly in an elegant open carriage.

"Who is that?" asked Katherine.

"Oh, the Countess Korinski they were talking of before we came out: I forgot you had not seen her yet."

"I wonder whether she is—no"—continued Kate—"she *cannot* be the person who was such an annoyance to the Selwyns! Do you think there are *two* Countess Korinskis?"

"I know there is a Baroness Korinski, and I daresay the Selwyns have confounded the one with the other. English people *do* make such a mess with foreign titles! But here we are, after a long round, at Melnotte's, at last, and you have, I am afraid to say how many, pairs of shoes to get."

The carriage stopped, but before the ladies could alight, the very person they had been so lately discussing, Oswald Langton namely, walked up, and said, looking at Kate, though addressing Lady Carew, "I am quite sorry to be the bearer of bad news; but I am afraid Miss Desborough will miss Roxane, after all! Old Halifax is dead, and the

Fieldings are obliged to leave Paris to-morrow. Fielding told me so himself, five minutes ago."

"How provoking!" exclaimed Katherine, hastily, "for I *did* so want to see Rachel in Roxane!"

The moment she had uttered the words, she felt annoyed with herself, for having so fully betrayed the extent of her disappointment; and added, with a very fairly acted smile, "that she had no doubt it would be good for her to spend a quiet evening."

"Very good, I daresay," replied Langton. "That is quite the philosophical way of viewing these things; but having prepared you for your misfortune, I ought not to keep you from your business with Mr. Melnotte's people; and, in fact, I *ought* to be at the Louvre myself by this time, to meet Otway."

So saying, he opened the door, handed Miss Desborough out, and was preparing to do the same by Lady Carew; but she declined his services, telling Kate "she was too tired to accompany her, though in no hurry," and bidding Langton lose no time in keeping his appointment. Katherine did not like to abuse the freedom given her, so contented herself with choosing what she was most in need of, deferring the rest of her purchases to another day; but found, on issuing from the "Magasin," that there had been no occasion for so much scruple; for, as Langton was still leaning on the carriage door, it was plain that her friend had not been left to solitary reflections

in the interim. The sight of her apparently reminded him of his friend at the Louvre, for he made a hurried bow, both to her and to Lady Carew, and departed, with quick steps, without waiting to hand her back into the britschka.

"What a gossip that man is, sometimes!" observed Lady Carew, as they drove homewards. "Fancy his standing here all that time, telling me stories of Robert Hazlewood's and Tom Waterfield's 'Paris experiences!' I wonder if poor Captain Otway is still waiting for him in the gallery!"

She then proceeded to lament Katherine's disappointment about Roxane. "I should make Sir Edward get over his objection to tragedies, and take you himself; but unhappily, he dines that very day at the 'Rocher de Cancale' with old Villarceau, and another cotemporary of his, so you comprehend . . . ."

"Oh, Isabella, I wouldn't have Sir Edward put out of his way for the world!"

"*I* should'nt mind the least, if it were anything short of a 'Cancale' solemnity; but I know it's out of the question; and I have the greatest of inclinations to take a box myself, and go with you, only I got *such* a splitting head-ache the last time I was in a theatre, and Sir Edward was so angry with me for my imprudence, in spite of experience!"

"Oh don't speak of it, dearest Isabella! I can't tell you how sorry I am for having talked so sillily; for, really and truly, I don't care—very little indeed —that is."

By this time they were at home, where they found a note of polite regrets from Mrs. Fielding, which Katherine read with great outward equanimity, and then proceeded to dress for dinner, with the resolution of being so cheerful, that no one should perceive how keenly she regretted the oft deferred pleasure she had been making sure of for the last three days. She exerted herself so much, and conversed in so lively a strain, to support the character of indifference, that old Sir Edward, instead of sinking gradually into sweet repose, as was his custom, grew talkative, instead of sleepy, after dinner. Lady Carew left the drawing-room for a space, as she often did, when no duties of society retained her, to sit for a while by little Adela's bedside; and during her absence her husband discoursed long and learnedly on various subjects, amongst which he was chiefly pleased to dilate on the characteristics, moral, personal and culinary, of different nations, from whence it was an easy transition to discuss their household peculiarities, and good and bad matrimonial qualities. The Italians were settled at once as "bad husbands;" the Spaniards little better; "the Germans," Sir Edward said, "passed for being good fellows enough —were easy-tempered, in general," which, as he observed, "was the main thing. But there were exceptions. He wasn't sure that all Germans did take things as quietly as the French would have you suppose. To be sure, the man he was thinking of, was, he believed, a Bohemian. Korinski, you

know, Isabella. Oh, I forgot, she's not in the room. Poor Emmie Forde!" he continued, "she didn't better herself, I take it, by the change from Blackwood: *he* let her do just as she pleased, both about money and everything else; while the count has got from her every shilling that Blackwood hadn't positively tied up, and though he has taken himself off to Brussels now, (the best place for him—a bad style of man!) she has to allow him part of her jointure, and it's all she can do to live here as she does."

"Then," said Miss Desborough, "this Countess Korinski was a Miss Forde!"

"To be sure," replied he, "sister to Forde, of Stockridge, and to Mrs. Henry Talbot."

"And has this lady been in England since her second marriage?" enquired Katherine.

"Why, I should just think she had," answered Sir Edward, with a peculiar kind of smile, "for they *do* say she astonished some of her countrywomen—ay, and of her country-*men*, too—not a little! Isabella doesn't like to hear the anecdotes—particularly that about —— so it's no use repeating them—and you know *I* don't vouch for facts. She's a ladylike woman, at any rate (Isabella's quite Quixotic about her), but Korinski's a black leg, as well as everything else, and the worst sin she ever committed, to my absolute knowledge, was marrying *him*."

The whole story fitted; and the Countess Korinski was evidently the same whose talents

and winning manners had so completely bewitched the Selwyns, up to the time when the discovery of her real character had forced them to discard her. Of her identity there could be no doubt; she had been Emily Forde, afterwards Mrs. Blackwood, and had finally married this Korinski, from whom she was now separated. There might be a Baroness as well as a Countess Korinski; but it was the sister of Mr. Forde, of Stockridge, whose character had become so infamous in her own country; and this woman was a favorite companion of Isabella's! Katherine felt a sort of sickness at the thought of any intimacy between this degraded being, and that friend whom her imagination had again raised to be the same ideal of perfection she had worshipped when emerging from childhood. What could she say, what could she do, to open the eyes which were blinded, partly, it was probable, by the countess's captivating qualities, but still more by that generous disposition to believe that those who were much blamed were generally much slandered, which so eminently characterized Isabella! Her husband's cynical indifference prevented *him* from saying a word in season; he knew the reports current against the countess, evidently thought them as likely to be true as false; but *did not care.* How was the right thing to be said by Katherine, without too broadly showing contempt for his views, or without stepping somewhat out of the place which a girl of nineteen holds towards a

married woman of between three and four and twenty? These reflections perplexed Miss Desborough sorely during the rest of the evening; her disappointment about 'Roxane' was almost forgotten, and chiefly remembered when she felt that, however disinclined, she *must* go on talking to her host and hostess about every trifle that came uppermost, lest they should misinterpret her silence. She went to bed in a doubtful mood, but left her room next morning with the resolution of telling Isabella her own feeling on the matter, the first time the conversation afforded any handle for the subject.

She was alone with her, as usual, during the interval between her host's departure and her drawing master's arrival; but that space of time was so entirely filled up, partly by listening and replying to little Adela Carew's prattle and caresses, and partly in answering her mother's inquiries about a nursery governess strongly recommended by Mrs. Oakly, that, except "by main force," it was impossible to bring in the countess.

"Well," said Miss Desborough to herself, as she withdrew, on the announcement of Mr. Desanges, to the room set apart for her lessons, "if I can neither find nor make an opportunity, perhaps it is a sign that I had better not try! and indeed, Isabella's own conduct puts her so completely beyond the breath of scandal, that her

having one undesirable friend is of the less importance!"

Still it recurred to her, while she was drawing, that she could not bear Isabella's being thought indifferent to the good or bad reputation of her friends, and if so, ought she not to do her utmost towards the averting of a consequence she knew she could so ill endure? But before she had come to a precise decision as to her "duty" on that point, one o'clock struck, Mr. Desanges took his leave, and Katherine proceeded to the dining-room, where she found Lady Carew already seated at the luncheon table, and holding in her hand a note, which she threw to her, saying:

"You are in luck, after all, Kate! Madame de Korinski has never seen Bajazet; is going to-morrow, and wants us to accompany her; of course *I* decline—a playhouse kills me—but I have accepted for you, and I am *so* glad you can gratify your fancy!"

Miss Desborough looked like anything but a young lady whose "fancy," of whatever kind, was to be gratified, for her face expressed the extreme of painful embarrassment, as she replied, with hurried utterance:

"Oh, my dear Isabella, don't think me the most capricious of beings! or, rather, *do* think so, provided you will only write one of your most polite of "Sévigné" notes, to tell Countess Korinski, in whatever form you like best, that I am engaged

—not well—in fact, unable to profit by her kind invitation!"

"What has come over you, Kate? Don't you wish to see Rachel in Roxane, now?"

"As much as ever. But—but—"

After stammering on thus far, Katherine felt she was fairly "in for it," and now poured forth, more rapidly than coherently, all the reports she had ever heard, all the facts she was convinced of, tending to show "that Madame de Korinski was a person whom her own family would decidedly object to her becoming acquainted with, and whom it must be a disadvantage for any and every woman to receive into intimacy."

"Poor dear child!" answered Lady Carew, compassionately. "So you are denying yourself a pleasure you value, because of Selwyn stories!"

"Not only because of Selwyn stories, I assure you, Isabella! for I know, through a friend of mamma's, who is acquainted with Mr. Forde, that he would not let his wife and daughter go to Mrs. Talbot's, while this countess—his and Mrs. Talbot's sister—was staying there; and everybody said he could not have done otherwise."

"Then, my dear," returned Lady Carew, "all I can say is, that 'everybody' was, on that occasion, what 'everybody' generally contrives to be—very ill-natured, or very ignorant—often both. I know that her brother is an odious man; or, at least, his wife, who rules him, is an odious woman—prejudiced and envious to the last degree

—so the whole thing is perfectly explicable to me. I have never believed myself that Madame de Korinski has been anything more than unfortunate in both her marriages, and too unworldly to be always prudent in speech and act. She is all the less so for being generous and warm-hearted; and I am aware that every Englishwoman who marries a foreigner, is invariably suspected—especially if that foreigner proves a bad husband—of being no better than she need be. But it almost shows people can hardly believe their own stories about her, that she is received everywhere."

"In Paris, perhaps."

"I mean in the English society in Paris."

"Yes, I daresay," said Katherine; "but so are many others, who, as you and Mrs. Palmer were agreeing the other day, are not visited in London, where I can't doubt Countess Korinski's having tried in vain to push her way last season; for something that Mr. Shelburne said yesterday quite confirms it."

"It does not say much for the wisdom and right-mindedness of the London leaders of fashion and propriety," observed Lady Carew (who, as Kate noticed, did not contest the fact itself), "and it does little credit to the consistency of those who shut and open the gates of good society," proceeded she, "that they should—as they certainly do—reject at home what they welcome when abroad; but I would not for the world sway you to what you dislike or disapprove of; only, as I had never

myself doubted of her fitness for my own company, it never occurred to me either, that there could be any objection to your going to the play with her. Yet, after all, Kate, take it which way you will, what harm could you get by sitting two hours in the same box with her? I don't suppose you would mind being in the same room! You know you are not obliged to swear eternal friendship to your one night's chaperon."

"No, I am not; and you are right in thinking I should not run out of the room because she walked into it; but what we are talking of involves receiving a kindness—accepting an obligation—from a person to whom I do not wish to owe any. I may meet her without scruple, for I can't help other people's opinion about her being different to mine; whereas, I *can* help going with her to see Roxane for my own pleasure, which would be making use of her, and that is a very different matter!"

There was something in Lady Carew's whole countenance, and in the expression of her downcast eyes, as she sat for a moment or two without speaking, which disposed Katherine inwardly to accuse herself of unkindness to her, in thus bluntly stating the degree in which she would or would not tolerate the presence of a person, for whom her friend professed so much regard. She knew that few, in her place, would bear with temper, from a younger companion, what sounded so like a reproof; and it was therefore with an increase of love and

admiration that she saw Lady Carew's sorrowful look change to an affectionate smile, as she exclaimed:

"I can't be angry with *you*, dear Kate, whatever I may be with those spiteful people who have filled your head with nonsensical tales, that make you think it your duty to give up the very thing I was so rejoiced to see put in your power! But you will think better of that, I hope. Madame de Korinski will be here to-night; you have as good eyes, and, as I think, rather better judgment than most folks, so you shall decide whether the Selwyns' opinions, or mine, are most likely to be correct."

"I know very well whose are the kindest!" replied Katherine, warmly. "But, dear Isabella, you will write—write *now*—will you not? to say—to let Madame de Korinski know, before I see her, that I shall not be of the party to the play."

"No, I can't do that; because—don't look so alarmed, Kate, you shall not be entrapped into doing anything you don't think right—it is because she tells me not to *send* any answer, as it would very likely miss her. Where's her note? You see she will be driving out with Madame de Rosmond, then dining at the—I *cannot* make out the name—and dressing there to go with them to the Kinnairds' (plenty of people, you perceive, to keep you and me in countenance, Kate), and then she comes on here, chiefly, she says, to be introduced to my young friend, 'of whom she has heard so much.'"

Miss Desborough felt at once that this "intro-

duction" would be so surpassingly awkward, if it occurred before the countess was prepared for her refusal, that her best course would be to remain in her own room that evening, and not appear at the soirée at all. It was a disagreeable thing to say; but, after some struggle with herself, much stammering and hesitation, Katherine succeeded in bringing out her plan, which was the more difficult to adhere to, from her perception that the bare proposal of it gave extreme annoyance to the friend of whose affection she was so thoroughly convinced, even in the midst of their difference of opinion. She stood firm, however, and after a few minutes Lady Carew ceased to oppose her, saying, kindly:

"Well, my dear child, you must do as you please. I shall miss my Princess Caterina gliding about the rooms, and so will many others; but it shall have its own way, that it shall! Only, Kate, my poor friend can't by possibility show herself here till near twelve, as she goes to the Kinnairds' first; so you might, at least, vouchsafe your presence to us for as long as it was permitted to Cinderella to be at the ball, mightn't you, without bating an iota of your stateliness?"

The words were uttered in Lady Carew's most caressing manner, and with a look of fondness and admiration, to which our heroine was by no means insensible.

"I will stay till eleven, depend upon it!" cried she. "How kind you are to care so much about me, dear, dear Isabella! and how sorry I

am not to be able to think exactly as you do in everything!" So saying, she kissed Lady Carew warmly, and then left the room to prepare for a stroll in the Tuileries Gardens, with her and little Adela, which was to precede their afternoon drive.

CHAPTER XII.

"I THOUGHT Isabella was going to be downright offended when I spoke of not appearing to-night," said Katherine to herself, while contemplating the white dress just arrived from the maker, which lay on the bed, ready to be put on. "I could not have much wondered if she had; for, of course, since she believes all that woman's inventions (as I know they are) about her brother's unkindness, she thinks me sadly prejudiced, and a little unfair too, perhaps, for deciding so absolutely about to-morrow without taking the opportunity of 'judging for myself.' Isabella is bewitched by this countess, or by her own generosity, rather; else she would be the first to see, either that if I were introduced to her to-night I could not well tell her to her face that I would not go to the play with her to-morrow; or that *if* I went with her, I should be 'obliged to be obliged to her,' whatever she is. I am glad, however, that I have told Isabella what was on my mind; for, as she is not offended, and bears one's differing with her so amiably, I think she will believe me later; and if I stay as much longer here as she wants me (I wonder whether they will give

me leave!) I fancy I *shall* be able to convince her, that she does herself injustice in being seen with such a person.

"The countess is a very provoking person to me, any how," said Katherine, in conclusion of her soliloquy, as she began to unroll the long coils of her chestnut hair, in order to its being dressed again with adornments suitable to the rest of her costume; "for it *is* provoking to have to run away, before the evening is half over, on account of her! I wish old Mr. Halifax could have contrived to live a few days longer, and then I should have gone to see Roxane in peace!"

When dressed, and in the drawing-room, however, she was obliged to think of other things and other people. She knew she was expected to help in entertaining the visitors, who were numerous, considering that there was that evening a "Réception" at the Belgian Embassy, as well as at a Mrs. Kinnaird's; and she performed her part, from nine till ten, so diligently, that she had all but forgotten Rachel, Roxane, old Halifax, and the countess, when she was suddenly reminded of every one of them by the sight of Oswald Langton, who had been the first to inform them of the old gentleman's decease, and who was now standing beside Lady Carew, in the doorway of a kind of little passage room. He appeared to be in rather earnest conversation with her, and the slightly sarcastic expression so often traceable in his features, seemed not unmixed with an air of

politely repressed displeasure. The lady to whom Katherine was talking, when his presence first reminded her of her "grievance," was anxious to examine some rare flowers, placed on a little table near the doorway above mentioned, and drew her young friend on towards it, in order the better to admire the uncommon and beautiful contents of the two Bohemian glasses which had attracted her attention. While answering the lady's queries as to whence they had been procured, etc., she fancied she heard her own name pronounced by Langton, and looking involuntarily towards him at the sound, her eyes caught his as well as those of Lady Carew, who immediately turned towards her, saying, gaily, "Kate, Mr. Langton won't believe you have given up Roxane for want of a proper chaperon."

"If he won't, I can't help it," answered Katherine, in the same lively tone.

"But I was not mistaken, was I?" said he, "in supposing that you did, that you *do* wish to see Bajazet?"

"Not at all mistaken," returned Miss Desborough, surprised, and somewhat amused, at being so closely questioned.

"Then," continued he, in a tone between jest and solemnity, "whoso desires the end must desire the means; and therefore, Lady Carew, it follows that your friend . . . ."

"No, it does not follow at all, Mr. Langton!" interrupted Katherine, whose flower-loving com-

panion had now met with a more sympathizing acquaintance, "it does not follow, the least in the world; for, being a woman, I am not bound by logical rules, and have never yet thought myself obliged to accept conclusions for the sake of premises, as I think you call them, or premises for the sake of the other thing."

"That is very wrong of you, Miss Desborough," said he, with assumed gravity, "as I will endeavour to prove to you if . . . ."

"I *must* go to receive La Princesse de B——," exclaimed the mistress of the house, and she hastened away towards the entrance door, at which that lady (the highest in rank of her guests that night) was being announced at the moment. Katherine's presence was not needed to complete the proper reception of the Princess de B——, but she looked round, and was about to join herself to a group of French ladies whom she knew slightly, when Langton said:

"Don't run away, Miss Desborough! we have not had our talk out; there's no one near enough to be bored, or shocked either. You are not 'une demoiselle Française parfaitement bien élevée" yet—nor are the conditions of your success and estimation the same as those of a Parisian young lady! So pray tell me, if you like to see Rachel to-morrow, and the Gräfin Korinski likes to take you to see her, what on earth should hinder you profiting by the opportunity?"

"I should have thought it might be plain enough," answered Katherine, gravely.

"What, you mean that Lady Delamere and Mrs. Wortley wouldn't visit her in London two years back, and that Madame de Villarceau tells stories of her which I consider the *narrator*, at least, must have some assurance to be able to communicate?"

"You mean, then, that you think the Countess Korinski is slandered?" asked Katherine.

"Slandered? hem—I can't enter into that," said he, shrugging his shoulders. "It would take a long while to get at, and sort neatly, all the various pieces of truth and falsehood jumbled together in the Parisian ladies' verdict upon her. I don't pretend to do that; but as to what concerns *you*, Miss Desborough, I can tell you that neither the Harfords, the Palmers, nor the Stewart Shelburnes will criticise your making a little use of the lady; and Charles Shelburne, who is to be of her party to-morrow, told me he 'expected you to make one of them.' I don't say I would advise your doing the same thing in London; but the identical people give themselves—and their friends too, luckily—a far larger margin here than at home; so that, if you like to see the representation, there is, in fact, nothing to prevent your enjoying it."

"Then you think I had better go, do you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"So you advise me, without any other motive than sheer pleasure, to seek the company, to accept the kindness of a woman you can't yourself say a word for! The Harfords and Shelburnes wouldn't object,

indeed! Mr. Langton, you wouldn't give such advice to your sister!"

She fixed her keen eyes on him as she uttered the last words. He gazed with astonishment on the countenance—beautiful in its proud indignation—which he had never till then seen thus glowing and expressive; and it was after a pause, and with some hesitation, that he at last echoed the word "sister!"

"Yes, Mr. Langton! you know in your heart that you would never have given such advice to Cecilia, at my age—at any age!"

"No, not to her, perhaps," muttered he; "but there's a difference."

"What difference?" interrupted Katherine, drawing herself up to her full height, and casting a yet haughtier glance on her self-constituted counsellor. "What difference is there in these points between her and me? I am not like Cecilia—I wish I were! for I am not gentle and patient, and forbearing and pious as she is. But what, tell me, have I ever said or done, that should authorize you to think *that* company good enough for me, which you would not recommend to her?"

She was breaking away angrily, but the ever-increasing crowd now retarded her movements, and ere she had been able to place one dense group between herself and her enemy, he was at her side, saying:

"Hear one word, Miss Desborough, before leaving me in displeasure! For my sister's sake, hear me!" added he, as she stood in silence with

averted face. She turned her head slowly and said, in an unsteady voice, without raising her eyes:

"For your sister's sake, yes! What do you wish to say?"

"To express my regret for having misunderstood, misinterpreted you."

"I had given you no right to do so," returned she, chafing anew.

"No right, properly speaking; but . . ."

"If I had *seemed* to give it you even, you ought to have been slow to judge your sister's friend!" cried Katherine.

"I ought, indeed," replied he, in a low voice, but steadily, "and I should have been slow—unable—to class Cecilia's friend among those, whose calculated frivolity allows them just so much virtue as is needed for their interested speculations; but—but . . . ."

"But what, Mr. Langton?" asked she, somewhat impatiently, though without quailing under the fixed look he fastened on her.

"Miss Desborough," said he, hurriedly, and with something of confusion in his countenance as he withdrew his eyes from hers, "if you do not wish to be misjudged, misinterpreted, by erring mortals who, like me, can only see the outside both of what is worthy and what is base, why are you here, far from home and kindred, in this corrupted city, apparently engrossed by the pettinesses of a society given over to vanity, and by

the pleasures of which such a society is alone capable?"

It was now Katherine's turn to feel and look surprised; but she commanded her countenance as well as she could, and replied, "that she did not quite understand Mr. Langton; for," continued she, "I should comprehend your feeling perfectly, if you belonged to that class of persons who consider all amusements, social or theatrical, as in themselves pernicious, if not criminal; but knowing that you are not influenced by those opinions, I cannot conceive what there is in my course of life to justify such conclusions as you seem to have formed. As to my being in Paris, it is with my mother's consent and approbation, and under the roof of my most intimate friend; you are strangely severe if you take exception at that; especially when you may recollect that your own sister was here for six weeks, last year, with the Bathursts."

"You are a terrible hand at hunting one into corners!" ejaculated he; "but the fact is—how shall I express it civilly?—the truth is, the Carews' set is a very queer one."

"Is it?" exclaimed Katherine. "Then why don't you tell Isabella—Lady Carew—that such is the case? She would, I am sure . . ."

"No—no—no; you are not at all sure of what would happen if I were to make such an imprudent remark, which I should be grateful if you would not repeat; though I should be most *un*selfishly glad if you would act upon it, as regards

yourself. You will say I am a proper cool fellow! But Lady Carew has her husband to guide and direct her."

"*What* a guide! what a director!" cried Katherine.

"*You* would not have taken him for yours?" asked Langton.

"I! God forbid! never! But," added she, checking herself, "Isabella fancied it her duty to obey her mother—I was never so tried; still, I *think* I would sooner have gone out as a governess than taken him!"

"I believe you would," said Langton, gravely.

The time-piece in the boudoir struck eleven at that moment, and Katherine exclaimed, "I must vanish now; I must be out of sight before Madame de Korinski appears; will *you* remind Lady Carew to explain that it is impossible I should accompany her?"

"I will. I was never made more glad or more sorry by any decision than I am by yours. Good night, since you must depart! But you have forgiven me, I trust?"

She held out her hand, he pressed it long and warmly, and she hastened through the other door of the boudoir to her own apartment.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON reaching her own room, Katherine threw herself on the nearest chair, and took a deep breath. She was then first aware that she trembled to the very tips of her fingers, that her neck and temples burned with as hot a glow as her cheeks, and that her every pulse throbbed so violently that she could have fancied she heard its beating. She almost wondered how her limbs had carried her from the boudoir to where she now sat—not in peace, for her agitation had been far too great to subside speedily—but in silence, in solitude, and in full freedom to revolve in her mind every particular of the strange dialogue, in which she had just borne her part with Cecilia's brother. Her blood boiled with indignation at the callous indifference to right and wrong he had, at first, displayed; at the contemptuous opinion of herself, implied by the cool assumption that she, too, could be guided by no higher motives. But, then, his confession that he had been "mistaken in her;" his accounting for that mistake on the ground of her being with the Carews and "their set;" and the expression of his deep regret for having so

misinterpreted her—what did all these things mean? It was difficult to imagine that he was not in earnest—very much in earnest—when he told her, at last, "how glad her decision had made him!" "Glad and sorry," he had said. "Sorry, I suppose," thought she, "for the disagreeable dialogue it had given rise to. He certainly showed sorrow, though I don't know that I should have believed in it, had it been only shown in words; but no one can turn crimson and white again in two seconds, from the mere wish to act confusion; and he *did* look ready to sink into the earth when I asked him how he could so misjudge Cecilia's friend! He was more ashamed, indeed, than I should have thought a man *could* have been, who had just uttered such sentiments as he had given me the benefit of. He seemed really and honestly relieved, too, by my consenting to listen to him; and I am sure I never before saw his face wear such an expression as it did when I gave him my hand just now. I am glad I spoke out to him, though; for, awkward and painful as it is to have had such a discussion with a comparative stranger, he is Cecilia's brother, after all, and I could not bear to be misconstrued by him!"

But if, in spite of everything, Katherine Desborough was glad that she could be no longer "misconstrued," her mind reverted, with increasing disturbance, to the expression which had escaped Langton's mouth while accounting for that very "misconstruction," namely, "that the

Carews lived in a queer set." If this statement were true, it ought, surely, not to have been clogged with a request for secrecy, seeing that contact with society which was objectionable for her, could not be advantageous for Lady Carew. But *was* it true? Might it not rather be that the clever, cool, calculating man of the world (for as such Lady Carew had always described him) had just coined a little convenient slander to soothe her offended pride, by giving her to understand that his "mistake" had only arisen from seeing her in society unworthy of Cecilia's friend? But this hypothesis was rejected as soon as formed; for a something—difficult to define, though strongly felt—convinced her that from the moment she had "conjured with his sister's name," the brother had lost either the power, or the will, to use art or subtlety. She remembered, too, that she could have had no right to take exception at his original advice at all, had he chosen to profess belief in the Countess Korinski's innocence; but he had been so perfectly sincere on that head, that she was the less justified in suspecting him of insincerity on any other. He had, it was true, irritated her that night to the utmost; but he had also given token of more interest—expressed his feelings and opinions more openly—than she had ever yet known him do. The whole was a riddle; and the only matter to be reflected on with satisfaction was, that, albeit she could not, without something like a breach of implied faith, repeat to Isabella what

had been said of "her set," there was no such restraint upon letting her know that Langton's opinion of the Countess Korinski (though not exactly expressed in words) was, plainly, much the same as Mrs. Selwyn's.

She did not go to bed the sooner for having retired to her own apartment a full hour before Lady Carew's guests departed; for she felt so thoroughly, so painfully awake that she knew it would be vain to attempt seeking repose; and it was not till after she had heard the last carriage roll away under the "Porte Cochère," that she was able to give something like attention to a rather difficult German book she had taken up, in order to force her thoughts into a less unquiet channel than that in which they had been hurried along. Gradually, and not without some effort, she grew able to fix her mind on the words before her, and to exert it so as to catch the full sense of what was written in a language not so familiar to her as Italian or French. This occupation, at last, tired her out sufficiently to render her brain weary and her eyelids heavy; she felt, in time, that sleep was weighing on her whole being, laid aside her book, and having stretched herself calmly in her bed, soon sank into total forgetfulness of all that had kept her so long a watcher.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEXT morning she woke late, and notwithstanding her utmost haste, was so much beyond her usual hour of appearing at the breakfast table, as to be obliged to stand various joking interrogations from Sir Edward, as to "whither she had betaken herself, when she vanished so suddenly at the striking of the hour before midnight?"

"*I* piously believe," said Lady Carew, "that you fled no farther than to your own sanctum; but remember, Kate," added she, playfully, "that if our friend the countess were only half the monster she has been represented to you, it wouldn't do at all to make an enemy of her! Such a lady as *that*, if she ever learnt how you fled before her, would soon have her revenge, and account for your rapid disappearance by a more interesting engagement than you would confess to! Luckily, she is the kindest—I might say the most good-naturedly credulous—little woman on earth; took all I said 'au pied de la lettre,' and was most innocently concerned at the indisposition which had obliged you to retire, and prevented you from making an engagement for to-night."

"I am very glad it passed off so well," answered Miss Desborough, blushing. "At all events, I am extremely obliged to you, dear Isabella, for making my excuses. I don't feel now as if I had ever cared about seeing Rachel in Roxane, and I look forward to such an evening's chat as I have not had this long while."

"What, because I dine at the Rocher?" asked Sir Edward. "Young ladies always think their secrets are safest with their female friends! but I can tell you, Miss Desborough," proceeded he, laughing at his own wit, "that if I were you, it's a steady prudent man, who knows the world, that would be the confidant for my money!"

Katherine made the best reply she could summon up on the spur of the moment, concluding with something about "gentlemen being often wearied with the little details of feminine gossip."

"Young ladies, like you, know very well they can't weary anyone," observed Sir Edward, as he rose from table.

When he was gone, his wife, who had for the last few minutes looked rather absently towards the window, turned, with a gay smile, to Katherine, saying "that she *did* hope they would have a really enjoyable 'tête-à-tête' that evening. But," continued she, "the ever punctual Emiliani is not due for a quarter of an hour yet; have you nothing—absolutely nothing—to tell me in the meantime?"

"Nothing," replied Katherine, colouring a good

deal, "nothing, except—except—that Mr. Langton made me very angry last night. I suppose he told you so?"

"He told me, in a general way, that 'he feared he had offended'—'hoped he had been pardoned;' but I don't know very distinctly what passed, and should like to hear."

Now, if Katherine's quarrel with Oswald Langton had not originated in a subject on which she and Lady Carew had differed, and if, moreover, she had not been yet farther hampered by the speech about the "Carews' set," nothing would have been so easy as to repeat every word that had been uttered. In fact, her first impulse would have been to see if her friend's wit, united to her own, might help to fathom the cause that had so suddenly changed the careless adviser, who assumed that any society was good enough for her, into the austere monitor, who, with a zeal and earnestness which implied deep interest, had given her counsels involving the sacrifice of great present pleasure. To do all this was impossible; but questioned as she was, there was nothing for it but to do the disagreeable thing of telling, to her intimate friend, a story of which she was obliged to keep back an important part. It could not, under the circumstances, be a very perspicuous one; and Katherine made it as short as she was able, saying, in conclusion, "I daresay it appears strange that I should have been so put out with Mr. Langton for giving me the same advice as you had; but then you

believe the Countess Korinski to be an innocent woman, while *he* "—and her eyes flashed again at the recollection—"*he* did not give himself the trouble even to pretend to think well of her. But," pursued she, "he has 'begged pardon,' and as he really seemed to feel he had offended, it was the easier to grant."

"Ah! yes, he saw he had made a mistake," said Lady Carew, "and then, like a reasonable, cool-headed individual as he is, apologised at once. It would have been too absurd, indeed, if you and he, who never were great friends, and so had no right to become enemies, had quarrelled on such a a silly score!"

A something slightly satirical in Lady Carew's tone, and in the view she evidently took of the probable amount of Langton's penitence, made Katherine think *she* had, perhaps, been very silly, in attributing to him the deep sense of shame under merited reproof, that had ended by calling forth feelings, which, while they puzzled her, served, nevertheless, to explain the possibility of sympathy between Cecilia and her brother. She wondered whether Isabella's opinion would have been exactly the same had *she*, on her side, been able to repeat "exactly" the words and looks that had passed; but she had not time to wonder long, for Lady Carew presently exclaimed:

"Look here, Kate, I want your advice! Can I, with propriety, being in mourning, choose either of these lavender silks for my dress at Baron R—'s?

Or should I not, as my bonnet is certainly to be white, restrict myself to black?"

The point was a knotty one; and the question was still at issue when Signor Emiliani was announced, so that the decision of the case was necessarily deferred.

"Well, my dear child," said Lady Carew to Miss Desborough, when they met again, after the lesson was over, "for all certain people say, virtue *is* rewarded sometimes! and you have it in your power to go to-night, with Madame de Villarceau, to Mrs. Charlemont's, to hear the Improvisatrice!"

"Have I, indeed?" cried Katherine, colouring with pleasure. "I am very, very glad! But are not you going, too? And how has it come about?"

"How it came about is more than I can tell you, my dear Kate," said Lady Carew. "All I know is, that Madame de Villarceau has been here, telling me that Mrs. Charlemont has been disappointed of one of her young lady guests, but that she thought there was an awkwardness about giving an invitation now, owing to her having refused to let the Hazlewoods introduce us. Whereupon, she (Madame de Villarceau) could not see that there was any difficulty to be got over, if the matter were but put in proper hands (her own, that is); and she, accordingly, came here to say, in the cleverest and politest way possible, what amounts to the fact that the 'Honourable Mrs. Charlemont will be happy to see

one of Mrs. Hazlewood's friends,' which, of course, must mean you; for, though a young lady may be taken about, here and there, without its signifying whether she is given a week's or an hour's notice, I don't know that *I* should exactly choose to go in so readily at a door which had not opened to me at once."

"That is why I feel doubtful about accepting," said Katherine. "I don't half like going to a place to which you have not been welcomed as you should be!"

"Oh, my dear creature, that will never do!" cried Lady Carew; "for if you eschew the poor countess, on the one hand, for her supposed sins, and Mrs. Charlemont, on the other, for her coolness and grandeur, you will get on nowhere! Seriously, your going to-night does not compromise me and my dignity the least in the world; so I have accepted for you; and, as I believe you won't mind being early at the Villarceaus', I thought I might arrange things in the way that will be most convenient, as regards the carriage, by sending you in it with Sir Edward, when he goes to the 'Rocher.' The improvising begins at some awfully primitive hour; for Mrs. Charlemont piques herself on 'getting her friends together,' as she calls it, an hour or two sooner than any one else can."

Miss Desborough made no more difficulty, and felt sincerely grateful to her hostess for the easy good-nature which impelled her, in spite of all

personal pique and punctilio, to urge her availing herself of the present opportunity of enjoying the offered pleasure.

"How kind she is!" thought Katherine. "I do believe she is almost perfection!"

It followed that, instead of Miss Desborough's passing the evening, tête-à-tête, with her friend (who remained alone, to read a new novel of Alexander Dumas, in undisturbed solitude), she dined with Madame de Villarceau, and then proceeded with her to the apartments in the Champs Elysées, occupied by the Honourable Mrs. Charlemont, by whom she was received with such a warmth of greeting, such an encouraging, as well as courteous manner, that she wondered how so polite and seemingly amiable a person could have been guilty of the sort of disobligingness with which she had met Mrs. Hazlewood's negotiation. The excuse then made was, evidently, a sheer pretext; for the "limited number of friends" proved to be a pretty numerous circle, yet not *so* numerous as to produce inconvenience, or be likely to be over much enlarged by the addition of two, or even more ladies. Katherine pondered awhile upon what might be the true ground of the refusal given, and would, perhaps, have pondered longer, had not Robert Hazlewood, emboldened, probably, by the absence of Lady Carew, edged himself near her chair, and favoured her with his intellectual conversation up to the moment when he was forced into silence by the commence-

ment of the performance, which thenceforth absorbed *her* entirely.

The present exhibition afforded no exception to the average character of such, being, as usual, of but middling merit intrinsically, though wonderful for the rapid skill with which the artist wove common-place imagery into smooth and musical verses, on any subject proposed to her by the company. The Improvisatrice was not handsome, but had something striking in her countenance and air, which would, probably, have obtained her the name and reputation of a beauty, had her voice been softer and her manner more calm. As it was, there was great truth in Robert Hazlewood's observation (made sotto voce to Katherine when the performance was over) "that the signora was a capital *sham*, seen at half the room's distance, but was much too 'harsh and hard,' when you came near her, for anything that was to be looked at off the stage."

Katherine partially agreed with him. "But," said she, "you must have noticed that when given a subject that really pleased her (as she was by your sister, towards the end) there was a fire and expression of genius in her eyes, which rendered her almost beautiful; it was so different from the sort of got-up excitement she thought it necessary to assume at other times!"

"I can't say I remarked much variety in her ways of going on; but you may be right, for I am no judge, you know, and don't take much interest in the sort of thing."

"I almost wonder, then," replied she, "that you came here to-night; you knew, did you not, what the entertainment was to be?"

"Yes, I knew," answered Hazlewood, with rather a sheepish look; "and yesterday I told my mother and Lousia that they wouldn't have the benefit of my company this evening; but something I heard at the Belgian Embassy, after we had left Lady Carew's last night, made me change my mind."

"And what could that be?" asked Katherine, making a painful effort to conceal her utter indifference.

"Why," said the young man, looking still more sheepish, and coloring as he spoke, "I found I should meet you."

"Meet me!" repeated Miss Desborough, in too great astonishment to take much notice of the "tender feeling" implied by this avowal. "How *could* you learn, at the Belgian Embassy last night, what *I* knew nothing of till two o'clock, p.m., this day? I had no notion, till then, that there was the least likelihood of my being brought here."

"I daresay you hadn't, Kate," returned Hazlewood, casting down his eyes with what seemed meant for a knowing look; "but," continued he, with a kind of giggle, "it's true, all the same, that *I* knew last night that you would be *asked* here, at all events; for I was close by when Langton was putting up Mrs. Charlemont to reward you

for showing so much spirit about—you know what I mean."

"Nay," exclaimed Katherine, in amazement, "what do *you* mean?"

"I mean just this," said he, plucking up courage. "You know the lady here hates Countess Korinski, and everyone who visits or speaks to Countess Korinski; she says she ought to be banished society, and all that sort of thing, and that she would have been, if Lady Carew hadn't taken her up this winter. But, as I was telling you just now, I stood close to her in the crowd when Langton came up and asked her 'if she knew what a kindred spirit she possessed in the person of Lady Carew's young friend?' going on to tell her how you wouldn't go to the play with her (Madame de Korinski, I mean) for love or money, for all you had set your heart on seeing 'Roxane;' and then he said, in a sort of a half joke, that you deserved a reward for your firmness, and that she ought to give you one. So she answered, as grave as a judge, 'that she always thought it a duty to show her sense of right feeling, and that as she believed Miss Desborough had a wish to hear her Italian friend improvise, she should *now* be delighted to gratify it; but there was a difficulty.' And just then they moved off, so I don't know what more they said to each other; though as to the 'difficulty' I knew pretty well what that must be, as it was my mother asked leave of Mrs. Charlemont, a fortnight back, to bring you and Lady Carew here, and didn't get quite

as civil an answer as she might have been given. But they settled it among them somehow; for when we were all going, Mrs. Charlemont came up to my mother, and made her a lot of pretty speeches, that meant to say, in a palavering fashion, that she wasn't to be surprised or affronted if she saw *you* here to-night, though *she* had not been allowed to introduce you. And then there was some more about 'having no scruple in receiving *you*,' while my mother couldn't be expected to propose bringing one instead of both her friends."

"Then did Mrs. Charlemont mean that she *had* scruples about receiving Lady Carew?" asked Katherine, gravely.

"I don't know; I never know half what that woman means," answered Hazlewood, who had now talked himself out of his sheepishness; "but you see, she has made a vow not to patronise anyone that patronises the Korinski; and then the Carews do live in a queer set, French and English, so I fancy . . . ." He stopped short, recollecting himself too late, and stood colouring more and more deeply, helpless and hopeless of struggling out of his hobble.

"In what way is the Carews' set so queer?" inquired Miss Desborough, calmly.

"Oh, I believe I ought to have said, that the Charlemont set *calls* them queer, that's all; and I daresay it's nonsense; wouldn't be said, either, if it weren't that—but I have always felt sure—you know lady Carew can't be expected—in fact,

we have never thought there was anything really to blame in her ways of going on."

"Has anyone else?" asked Katherine.

"No, no, not that I know of," stammered Hazlewood, waxing more and more frightened, and now eagerly desiring to put an end to the tête-á-tête he had been looking forward to all day. "One gets puzzled, you know," added he, "when one hears about so many different things and people, and I daresay I made a mistake. But there is Louisa, who never makes mistakes, and has been wanting to get near you all the evening! I must give her my place, or she'll not forgive me."

So saying, he fairly fled the country, leaving his sister with Katherine, who, after the first exchange of civilities, tried to obtain from her some account of the precise excuse given by Mrs. Charlemont, for not desiring her and Lady Carew's acquaintance. The young lady, however, self-possessed and cautious as her brother was blundering and confused, merely said, "she supposed Mrs. Charlemont had originally expected some friends who had disappointed her, and had then thought there would be an awkwardness in employing them (the Hazlewoods) to do that which she had previously declined receiving at their hands." Nothing more detailed could be extracted from her, and she shifted the subject so swiftly, and

so ingeniously, that Katherine could not even draw any conclusions from her manner of discussing it.

The party was now beginning to break up, and Madame de Villarceau told her young friend that she feared she must carry her off in a few minutes, which "minutes" were spent in listening to farewell speeches from the Hazlewoods and from Mrs. Charlemont, who said, with what might be called quite an affectionate pressure of her hand, that she hoped to see Miss Desborough again, whenever Madame de Villarceau or Mrs. Hazlewood could bring her, but without the slightest mention of Lady Carew. Katherine replied rather coldly to civilities which seemed so pointedly to exclude her friend; and was no sooner in the carriage with Madame de Villarceau, than she began exclaiming upon the singularity of Mrs. Charlemont's conduct, and expressing her dislike to having anything more to do with a woman who, however personally agreeable, showed such determined rudeness to Lady Carew. But Madame de Villarceau only laughed, treated the whole affair with indifference, said "it was just that woman's way," and finally settled the matter by exclaiming, rather impatiently, "Enfin que voulez vous, ma chère? C'est une pimbêche que la Charlemont, voilà tout!"

CHAPTER XV.

KATHERINE found Lady Carew still up, and was called into her dressing-room to be asked how she had liked her evening, and whether the Improvisatrice had answered her expectations?

"I am very glad to have heard her," replied Katherine, "very; for the gift she possesses is most wonderful, though I can fancy its being bestowed in greater perfection; still my attention was riveted while the verses flowed from her, and it was not till all was over that I found myself criticising; so that I may truly say I have been greatly pleased; but I am very angry with Mrs. Charlemont, whatever her motives were for asking me! Why couldn't she have the civility to tell Mrs. Hazlewood she found she had room for more guests than she had thought, and, at least, given you the option of going?"

"Why not, indeed?" said Lady Carew, stretching herself in her chair. "But I'm very glad she did not; I'm so tired of Improvisatori and Improvisatrici! Seriously, the Hon. Mrs. Charlemont has not shown herself the pink of courtesy towards me, and I shall never put myself in her

way in future; but her being an ill-mannered, illiberal piece of goods, was no reason why you shouldn't profit by her caprices; you needn't go near her again; she's an odious woman—I always knew that—but has her uses occasionally."

"It was very kind of you to be so anxious to give me pleasure!" cried Katherine, "most kind! but I don't know well what I ought to do—and yet it can't be wrong to tell you how it worries me to feel that that woman thinks herself justified in her impertinence to you, because—don't be angry with me, dear Isabella, for saying it, but I can't bear your having any friendships which make people say 'you live among a strange set!' It may be silly of me, but I can't endure being told such things!"

"And who on earth *has* been telling you such things, Kate?" asked her friend.

"Robert Hazlewood was the person; but then, you know, he is the echo of other people's talk!"

"The echo, sometimes, and sometimes—out of pure foolishness—the distorter of it," said Lady Carew, with cool disdain. "My dearest Kate, I can but love you for your zeal, and your affectionate fears; but, my sweet child, in this wicked talking world, you must put on a little indifference, or you will be perpetually miserable! As for me, I confess that Robert Hazlewood's, or '*his* set's' opinions upon me and mine, trouble me uncommonly little; and so long as you are not authorized to warn me from some rather different

quarter, I am afraid I shan't think it necessary to cut the poor countess, which is, I suppose, what Mrs. Charlemont wants. You are a dear, enthusiastic creature, though," continued she, throwing her arms round Katherine; "and you are looking handsomer than ever I saw you, with that half imploring, half indignant face of yours! Give me a kiss, Kate, and go to bed now (I hear Sir Edward just coming home), and don't let your dreams be troubled by recollections of Robert Hazlewood's nonsense."

Miss Desborough accordingly hastened away to her room, there to wonder whether she should ever grow as indifferent as she was expected to become on certain points, and to consider which was most likely to be mistaken, she, who did, or Lady Carew, who did not, attach importance to that criticism of society, the expression of which had struck her so painfully. Would Isabella despise it so entirely, would she remain so resolutely confident in her own blamelessness, so proudly regardless of the petty malice of others, if made aware of the singular coincidence in opinion—nay, even in the very phrase that clothed it—between the simpleton Robert Hazlewood, and the shrewd, observant Oswald Langton? Perhaps not. But, although Katherine had been just now momentarily tempted, by the scornful mention of "Robert Hazlewood and his set," to disobey Langton's injunctions, and strengthen her own arguments with his authority, her respect for that authority,

and her eager desire to make use of it, diminished as she reflected upon all that her communicative admirer had let her know concerning the "dessous des cartes" of her invitation to Mrs. Charlemont's.

There was something so disagreeable—so humiliating, even—in the sort of officious coolness with which Langton had talked over her "spirited conduct,"—in the off-hand fashion of his procuring her a "reward for good behaviour," that this "reward" was rather productive of resentment than of gratitude. Katherine's cheeks glowed as she thought how she had been cheated, the night before, into the belief that Oswald Langton had shown feeling on a subject which he evidently regarded as a good joke! and a sense of shame for having been so easily deceived, combined with her remembrance of the light in which his supposed "penitence" had been regarded by Lady Carew, fully determined her on keeping her own counsel, respecting the successful manner in which he had played upon Mrs. Charlemont's spite for her advantage. "Isabella knew him better than I!" said she to herself. "I only wish I could show him that I am not taken in by his assumed gravity, and pretence of giving good advice, when all the time he was probably thinking what best fun he could make of me and Mrs. Charlemont, whom he classes, I suppose, as two equally curious specimens of the genus prude! But unluckily one so seldom has the opportunity of making known those very feelings one most wishes to render people

aware of! Well, it can't be helped, provoking as it is; but I *am* sorry Cecilia's brother is so little worthy of her."

Thus ended Katherine's soliloquy; after which she betook herself to bed, where she certainly did not dream of Robert Hazlewood, nor yet of Oswald Langton, but of Lady Carew's introducing her to the Countess Korinski, who, the moment she turned to look at her, changed into the Improvisatrice Giacinta Santi, in her evening dress and laurel wreath, proposing, in Italian, that they should all take a walk in the Tuileries!

CHAPTER XVI.

To the steady upholders of the prophetic nature of dreams, it will be satisfactory to learn that Katherine's nightly visions were so far fulfilled, that the Countess Korinski did call in the course of the following day, that she was introduced to Miss Desborough, and that, though in no way resembling Giacinta Santi, either in countenance or costume, she did propose to the two ladies to join her and her attendant squire—a fair-haired youth of nineteen—in a saunter through the Tuileries. Lady Carew accepted, Miss Desborough declined (on the plea of expecting her drawing-master); but the visit lasted long enough for her to perceive that fame had not exaggerated the countess's powers of attraction. She was some years older than Lady Carew, and had not, properly speaking, any claim to be considered a beauty, though her ever-varying countenance, and the bright sparkle of her small but brilliant black eyes, so outweighed the irregularity of her other features, as to have won her the reputation of a "pretty little woman." Her manner was easy without assurance, and the extreme gentleness of her voice prevented the

wittily unexpected remarks, with which her talk was seasoned, from having any appearance of sharpness. There was only one point on which Katherine could be critical; and that, as she allowed to herself, was one she might never have detected, had she not been suspiciously on the watch to find a something which should betray the art of this apparently artless, but deeply corrupted woman. That "something" was, that the witty countess was a very delicate, but a very determined flatterer, who contrived, in a surprisingly short space of time, to slip in, between the strokes of lively satire she cast on others, playful insinuations of everything it would give her present hearers most pleasure to believe. While Lady Carew was in the room, the force of her artillery was necessarily divided; but when she left it, to put on her bonnet and scarf, the whole was poured upon Miss Desborough, who felt, in spite of disgust, that it required all her knowledge of the countess's real character, and all the evidence she possessed of it, to keep alive her belief in the duplicity of such a winning creature.

"She is a serpent!" said Katherine to herself, when left alone. "It is her interest to be noticed by any woman of unblemished character, so she plays upon Isabella's generous disposition to support the unfortunate!" And again her mind recurred to the possibility of finding a counter charm in the strong expression respecting "her set," used by the person whom Isabella was always

so ready to quote as a hard-headed, experienced man of the world. Langton, undoubtedly, was such, and, though she had thought otherwise for twenty-four hours, was probably nothing more; but in spite of his having sunk so terribly in her opinion, she still scrupled to say, without his permission, that which he had so earnestly besought her not to repeat. She wished she had his permission, but she was not much more likely to have courage to ask it, than to have the opportunity of letting him know, how willingly she would have dispensed with his going off to Mrs. Charlemont to amuse himself, by seeing if he could flatter her into bestowing an invitation she had formerly refused, by his tale about their "congeniality of opinions."

The weather was beautiful—the perfection of a May morning—and Lady Carew dwelt much, on her return, upon her "very pleasant walk and sit" in the Tuileries. "I made Emily send young Birkenstein away, that we might be to ourselves; and then, too,—we all preach to one another, Kate,—I wanted to give her a word of advice about taking him everywhere with her, as she does, in that careless way of hers. *I* understand its being sheer good nature to a boy who knows nobody, and gratitude to his mother the baroness, who was very kind to her in Vienna the year of her most unfortunate marriage; but her enemies will begin directly to talk as if it were something else."

Having thus herself alluded to her friend's "attendant squire," Lady Carew had the tact and the temper not to press Katherine with questions, resting content with the praise she freely bestowed (as it could be sincerely given) upon the countess's "wit and agreeable manners."

In the meanwhile, the day fixed for the entertainment to be given at Baron R——'s villa, a little way out of Paris, was drawing near; and it followed that every lull in conversation among the Carews' friends was broken by such phrases as—"Are you to be at the R——s'?" "I hardly know if I shall patronize the Baron." "Are you quite sure he patronizes you?" etc. Some talk of this kind was going on, one fine afternoon, in the Tuileries, among a group of young men, consisting of Oswald Langton, Mr. de Neyrac, young Shelburne, and a few others, who had collected round Madame de Villarceau, Lady Carew, and her young friend.

"Will this be your first appearance at any of the mighty millionaires' assemblies?" inquired Langton, moving a little behind the rest as he spoke; for Katherine's chair happened not to be exactly in the same line as those occupied by the two other ladies.

"Yes," replied she, "it will; and I look forward with some curiosity to assisting at one of them, as those great crowds generally include at least two or three of the remarkable persons of

the day, whom one constantly hears talked of, and whom it is a satisfaction to have seen."

"Very sensibly answered," replied Langton, with a slight curve of the lip, which gave his words a somewhat sarcastic meaning, and provoked Katherine to rejoin, rather sharply, "that she was glad he thought so."

"I am sorry my observation seems to have displeased you, Miss Desborough," said he, calmly, "would you have preferred my expressing a contrary opinion?"

"I almost think I should," cried she, half angry and half amused, "because, if you had told me outright that I was talking nonsense, or quizzed me openly for making a common-place speech (as I daresay mine was), I could have taken the set-down as well as I have often taken rougher ones at home; but it's unfair to make those remarks one hardly likes to notice, for fear of quarrelling about what is not worth a quarrel, at the same time that they tell one plainly that one isn't thought worth being talked to straightforwardly."

"Oh, that's what you want! — straightforwardness! I can give you as much as you like of it," said he, fixing his eyes on her with a good-humoured openness of look, which went far to restore peace between them. "The truth is," he continued, "since you will have truth, I did not think what you said silly—perhaps I should have liked it better if it was—nor yet exactly

common-place, for a young lady's speech; but I thought it too set—too cut-and-dried—for *you*. It would have been the very thing for Miss Hazlewood, who can't bear to seem to go anywhere except for an instructive purpose. I was provoked at hearing it come out of your mouth; and I was rude. Am I not straightforward now?"

"Oh, yes! that's just what I should have liked you to have said at first, and I believe I understand the impression my answer made on you; for when one has very little to say, and yet must say something, one gets into a way of giving the first reason that comes into one's head for doing this, or going to the other place, when perhaps there *is* no reason at all. But, really, though I suppose I expressed it stiffly, I *am* curious to see M—— and L——, supposing they are to be seen at Baron R——'s. Don't you believe that possible?"

"Yes, I do believe it," returned Langton, "and I can only say again, as I did before, that something in your manner provoked me, and I was rude, very rude; which, being straightforwardly confessed, I look on myself as, by implication, pardoned. But, Miss Desborough, you need never fancy yourself obliged to give reasons when you have none; it may be necessary for some people, but I am sure not for you. *You* needn't have been afraid of looking foolish if you had said (supposing it to be true), 'I don't know why on

earth we are going, except that we have ordered our dresses.'"

"I shouldn't so much expect to be thought *foolish* for such a kind of answer, as pert and airified," said Katherine.

"Should you much mind being thought those things?" asked he.

"Why, it would be according to who the people were who considered me so."

Langton declared she was growing diplomatic, and that his straightforwardness entitled him to expect more frankness in return; she asserted that it was impossible to treat him with more; and there ensued between them a sort of playful argument, which she would willingly have so turned, as to afford the opportunity of expressing to him her vexation at his "getting her asked" to Mrs. Charlemont's. But the consciousness of an extreme wish to do so, prevented her from taking quick and ready advantage of any handles she might have laid hold of for that end; while the sense of awkwardness given her, by her inability to say the thing she desired to say, deprived her speech of point and liveliness, and the conversation soon threatened to die away, through sheer flatness on her part.

The knot of persons in front had been talking gaily, on various subjects connected with the amusements of the coming week; and, after furnishing, between them, a pretty correct list of everything of that nature likely to take place for

ten days to come, had now returned to the starting-point of their conversation, to wit, Baron R——'s fête.

"You see," said one of the gentlemen, "it's not only that there are to be rivers of champagne, and heaps of all the fruits and vegetables that are *out* of season, but then there will be music such as never was heard, and national dances, performed by real Spaniards and Hungarians; and they *do* say—but Mrs. Charlemont stoutly denies it—that her Italian girl, Giacinta Santi, will actually improvise 'in public,' instead of to a 'favoured few,' at her patroness's own abode. It is a matter of great indifference to me," continued the speaker, "seeing that I, like you, Madame de Villarceau, was amongst those favoured few. You were there, too, Miss Desborough," proceeded he, turning round to address her. "How did you like the signora?"

"I was very much astonished by her," replied she.

"More astonished than pleased, perhaps," observed the gentleman.

"Kate is very glad to *have seen* her," said Lady Carew, interrupting herself in the full flow of talk she was engaged in with Mr. de Neyrac.

"Then I am afraid you were disappointed?" asked Langton of Katherine.

"Not exactly," answered she; "it would take a long time to explain precisely what I felt."

"But you had wished very much to hear her, had you not?" he inquired.

"Yes—but," continued she, colouring highly, and forcing herself to proceed, as she saw the others again engaged in conversation, "though I ought to be extremely obliged to you, Mr. Langton, for procuring me that invitation, I did not want to be indebted to Mrs. Charlemont, nor to be mentioned to her, and I had no need of being 'rewarded' like a child, for doing what I thought right!"

"Who told you I mentioned you to Mrs. Charlemont?" asked Langton, turning sharply round, and colouring in his turn.

"Robert Hazlewood heard you tell her I 'deserved a reward,' and she ought to give me one!"

"You seem terribly offended at being treated like a good little girl, instead of like a capricious young lady! But how could I know that Robert Hazlewood was within earshot? If he had been as far as he ought always to be from any reasonable conversation, you would never have known of my indiscretion (as I suppose you consider it), and the Giacinta would have had one more gratified admirer, without your thinking it incumbent on you to testify to me so explicitly that I ought to mind my own business."

"Perhaps," said Katherine, (unwilling to come to a second quarrel with him), "perhaps you did not consider how disobliging Mrs. Charlemont had been, when Mrs. Hazlewood wished to introduce Isabella and me."

"At all events," said he, after a pause, and in a

softened tone, "I did not enough consider the utter difference of feeling, and grounds, which lead to the same result in two such opposite beings as you and Mrs. Charlemont; or, rather, I did not resist—as I confess I ought to have done—the momentary inclination to see from its ridiculous point of view, the meeting-point between a mere spiteful woman of the world, and—and—you, Miss Desborough. I yielded to that passing fancy, and have offended, as, we all know, often happens, when our thoughts slip too quickly to our tongue. But," proceeded he, looking steadily at Miss Desborough, "whatever I said or did, my aim and end was *not* to procure you a reward; of that I give you my word of honour! so, as you have not suffered the sad indignity of being treated like a baby, perhaps you will forgive my other iniquities, and make up your mind to having been smuggled into Mrs. Charlemont's super-select coterie!"

"It would be too absurd to fight on for ever about such things," said Katherine, smiling, "and if I was angry, it's all gone away since . . "

She hesitated, and he finished the sentence for her by adding, "Since you have administered the scolding you had kept bottled up for me. There is nothing like 'spitting out one's venom,' I'm sure," continued he, as he rose to follow the example of Lady Carew, Madame de Villarceau, and the rest, "so now I suppose we may walk homewards in tolerably friendly fashion."

He offered his arm as he spoke; it was accepted, and Katherine said, with great earnestness:

"I hate quarrels!"

"*Do* you?" asked Langton, with a somewhat incredulous smile.

"Yes, indeed, I do," insisted she, "though I sometimes get into them; but now this one is over, I have a favour to ask of you, Mr. Langton."

"A favour!" exclaimed he. "Of course, I ought to say 'it's granted,' only as I am at once a cautious, and, for the present, at least, a straightforward individual, I don't pledge myself quite in the dark. In what way can I serve you, though? You don't want Countess Korinski to be stabbed? or Mrs. Charlemont to be poisoned?"

Katherine felt rather put out by his bantering manner, and walked on some steps in silence, till, just as they were issuing from the Tuileries gate, she gathered courage to say, rather hurriedly:

"You begged me not to repeat something you once told me about the 'set the Carews live in,' and I have not; but would you be so very kind as to allow me to do so now?"

"So that's your favour!" cried he, bluntly; but adding, after a pause, and in a more courteous tone, "I would grant it this minute if my doing so were likely to produce the least good; but it will not, and cannot."

"How should you know?" asked Katherine. "*You* have not lived from earliest youth in intimacy with Isabella! You are only acquainted

with the surface of her character, and can't form an idea of the nobleness and delicacy that exist under an outward show of what I suppose you think frivolity! I can't endure to sit by and look on, while she, in ignorance—yes, in *utter* ignorance of the opinions held by the wiser part of her friends—welcomes such unsuitable companions. It seems quite treacherous not to warn her!"

"She would not heed your warning," said Langton, almost sullenly.

"I think she would; but even if not, I should, at least, have done my part as a friend—acted frankly and straightforwardly. That is why I have caught at this opportunity of asking you for leave to speak. *Do* give it me! I am sure she will not be a moment displeased with you!"

"It was not of that—not of that alone, at least, that I was thinking," replied Langton, gravely, and with a look of great annoyance. "It seems hard to refuse what appears in itself so fair. I was a fool to let such words escape me that night!"

"No, Mr. Langton, not if they were true!"

He gazed at her for a second, with that same look of surprised admiration he had cast on her for the first time on the occasion of their original quarrel, and then said, composedly, "I will think about it."

They walked on for about a minute without either of them uttering a word; when, just as the party of which they formed the rear stopped

before a glove-shop, as if proposing to enter it, Langton said to his companion :

" You may speak if you please ; it can do no great harm. I release you."

As he thus somewhat ungraciously granted the requested favour, they came up with Madame de Villarceau and the others, who were standing in the doorway of the shop, into which Lady Carew had just gone to make some trifling purchase.

" I want a pair of gloves, too," cried Langton, " so I may as well get them now as wait till these are torn across," and he hastened into the shop, glad, Katherine thought, to put an end, no matter how, to a conversation which seemed to vex and embarrass him to a degree which astonished her in so cool and independent-mannered a person.

" Neyrac had to leave us at the Tuileries gate," observed Shelburne to Miss Desborough ; " had some indispensable engagement with his uncle, I think, upon business. Neyrac is a very amusing fellow, and a good judge of a horse, too—that's a fine bay he rides ; but I can't think why he's so solemn and complimentary whenever he takes leave, and makes such a fuss to explain *why* he is so unfortunate as to have to go another way ! I suppose," he added, musingly, and rather compassionately, " it's his being a Frenchman."

After having given out this opinion, he endeavoured to amuse himself, and Katherine, by his observations on the passers by, till, wearying of the employment, he exclaimed :

"What a time they are choosing their gloves! I vote we leave them to find their way home at their leisure, if Miss Desborough will let us escort her."

"Oh, you must not be so impatient," cried Madame de Villarceau, "and there is Lady Carew coming out! I am sure she has not kept us long."

"I don't think Langton has bought any gloves at all," said Shelburne, offering his arm to Katherine, while his companion did the same by Madame de Villarceau; and Langton followed the two other pairs, with Lady Carew, as far as her abode, where she and her friend parted company with the gentlemen and with Madame de Villarceau.

CHAPTER XVII.

KATHERINE followed Lady Carew into her room, and exclaimed hastily, even before she had well shut the door, "I have something to say to you, Isabella, something I have been longing to say for days! You told me," continued she, almost panting for breath, "you told me that you couldn't mind what the Hazlewoods said about your being so much with—with people who are not well thought of—you said you must be warned from 'other quarters' first—but it was because I had heard it from other quarters — it was because Mr. Langton . . . ."

She stopped from sheer inability to proceed. Lady Carew looked at her as if she hardly understood what she had been saying, and she went on, with much confusion of language and manner, to explain "that Robert Hazlewood's speech had only revived the anxiety previously produced in her mind, by Langton's having used the very same words the night before—a thing she was only now at liberty to repeat."

"So Langton, too, has been pronouncing our set a queer one!" said Lady Carew, sarcastically.

"Tell me exactly how, and in connection with what, he said such an unaccountable thing to you."

Katherine did so to the best of her power; and when she had told her tale, her friend observed coolly, "that Langton was, no doubt, on that occasion thoroughly embarrassed—'put out' by the perception of his own blunders, and that floundering from one mistake to another, and finding himself what is vulgarly called 'nonplussed' by the plain question of 'why *she* should not be in Paris as well as his sister,' he had, when pressed, invented the first reason he could think of, regardless of its truth or suitability. "He is, as I have often told you," continued she, "a thorough-going man of the world (you yourself have, till lately, always thought him so), and why you should lay such stress upon an opinion of his, given on a pinch to save his consistency at the moment, I can't fancy, except it be that you are so struck with its confirmation by a dictum of Solomon Hazlewood's, as to be thereby persuaded that there *must* be something in it! And you have been asking Langton's leave to repeat what he had put forth? No wonder he looked cross in the glove-shop, just now."

Katherine felt strangely abashed by this speech, which shewed her that she was in her friend's eyes foolishly gullible as well as tiresomely scrupulous; nor did she know how to express in words which should carry weight with them, her rooted conviction that, whether she were or were not mistaken

in some particulars, still things were not precisely as Lady Carew believed them to be.

"I suppose I seem very silly to you," she at last said, "and I must just make up my mind to appearing so, as I have no power to make you understand exactly how it all passed; but I will tease you no more about it, and I hope you are not angry."

"Not angry, certainly," returned Lady Carew, "only vexed that you should have been so much annoyed by what was not worth being annoyed about; nor do *I* think you silly, Kate! You are only innocent—too innocent. Langton can't understand that, of course, and complains that you are a difficult young lady to deal with—that you fasten strangely upon chance words said to you, and make mountains of mole-hills; but perhaps he only blurted that out, with a view to my being prepared to take what he had been teazed into letting you tell me, as exaggerated or misconceived."

"Well, I won't tease him again," said Katherine, in a submissive tone.

"I believe you are right in that," observed her friend, "for he is not a man with whom one gets any good by trying to go to the bottom of things; he had talked great nonsense, and put you off with a fib when asked the meaning of that nonsense; he is heartily ashamed now, and wants to have the whole matter forgotten, as it had better be by you as well as by him, if you are to keep the peace."

Katherine sat silent for a minute or two, her eyes fixed on the ground; when she raised them,

she thought she saw an expression of mingled weariness and irritation on Lady Carew's features, while her little foot twitched impatiently. The look, however, changed, and the motion ceased instantaneously, while she said, with a languid smile:

"Dear Kate, I'm horridly tired, as well as utterly stupid this afternoon; tired and stupid enough not to be even up to talking to you. So don't think me ungracious, if I ask you to leave me now to rest here for the present."

Katherine begged her pardon for having helped to tire her, kissed her affectionately, and sought her own room, in a state of greater dissatisfaction with herself than she had yet been in since leaving Wyngate. All she had to fall back on for comfort, was the consciousness of good intentions, which she feared were not so obvious to others as to herself. She hated and dreaded nothing so much as being thought meddling, prudish, willing to give unasked advice; yet she could not help feeling that had Isabella been less kind, she might have reproached her with being all those things, and she fairly sat down and wept with vexation at having uselessly exposed herself to being so thought of. Oswald Langton had been right in saying no good end would be answered by repeating his words; she had evidently annoyed him extremely by extracting from him the permission to do so; and she now considered, too late, that in her headlong eagerness to speak, she had over-

looked the circumstance that his sharing the general "prejudice" against the countess, was likely to prevent his opinion from having the weight she had expected. She heartily repented of her own pertinacity in bringing it forward, and resolved, for the future, not to attempt giving counsels which it seemed she had neither the eloquence to enforce, nor the skill to time suitably; though she still trusted that the day would come when her bungling, but well meant, endeavour might bear the desired fruit.

When Lady Carew came forth from her apartment at dinner-time, "rested" from her fatigue, it appeared as if she had no other object than to show by her manner, how entirely she attributed Kate's "expostulations" of that afternoon to affectionate zeal, which, though it might be excessive, flowed from no petty spirit of interference, or love of power. She did not allude to the subject; but talked gaily and brightly as usual on all topics, as they naturally arose, till Katherine, consoled by seeing that she was not misinterpreted, felt her spirits rise again to their accustomed pitch. She listened with glad smiles to the forming of plans for various expeditions to places in the neighbourhood of Paris, that had been deferred to the warmer and more settled weather, upon which—at the end of May—they were now entering, and she agreed with Lady Carew, that as her first hint at a prolonged stay in Paris, had not

called forth any displeased remark from her friends at home, the time was now coming for presenting her request in earnest.

"You see, my dear," said Lady Carew, "I can't afford to lose you yet. It is such a consolation," proceeded she, with a sort of half glance at the chair in which Sir Edward was snoring, "it is such a consolation to have you with me in the evenings! You won't deprive me of it sooner than you can help, will you?" added she, tenderly.

"Oh," exclaimed Katherine, "I shall be only too ready to stay! it is such a delight to be so loved and so sympathized with; and then, too," proceeded she, with an arch look, "it is so pleasant to have amusement found for one every day, instead of being given to understand that one must have a very ill-regulated mind, if one wants any at all!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

The day came for the much talked of entertainment at the abode of the wealthy Israelite; the weather was bright and beautiful, and everything appeared to promise pleasure to the invited multitude. Katherine was, at first, amused by the sight of the vast crowd assembled in the tastefully disposed gardens of the villa, by the over gay dresses of some of the guests, and the graceful costumes of others, as well as by the flitting backwards and forwards among the throng, of almost every one she knew, or had met before in Paris. But before long, disagreeable associations were awakened in her by the approach of the Countess Korinski, who, after shaking hands with Lady Carew, and nodding familiarly to Miss Desborough, whispered something in the former's ear.

"Kate, dear," said Lady Carew, in a low voice, while the countess turned for an instant to speak to some one else, "I know you don't like being much in Madame de Korinski's company, so as she has asked me to take a turn with her, towards what they call the Gipsy Camp, I think the best I can do for you, is to hand you over to Mrs. Hazlewood

till I come back; you may be sure I shan't keep longer away than I can help; and, in the meantime, you can get Louisa Hazlewood to tell you who every one is."

This proposal, though sounding reasonable enough, brought a blank feeling of disappointment upon Katherine; who, besides her annoyance at Isabella's thus publicly exhibiting her intimacy with the countess, was vexed on her own account, at being handed over to the Hazlewoods for a space of time, which, in spite of Isabella's assurance "that she would not be long," was indefinite, and likely—if Madame de Korinski could so contrive it—to be extended to a degree that Lady Carew no ways contemplated. There was no help for it however; Mrs. Hazlewood was, as usual, "charmed to take her young friend under her protection," and as Katherine saw her original chaperon walk gaily off towards the contrary extremity of the gardens, escorted by a lively group, she had need of all her pride, as well as of all her sense of principle and consistency, to keep herself from wishing that she had less loudly proclaimed her opinion concerning the Countess Korinski. She was not such a novice as to be ignorant how much of a young lady's pleasure, at such a fête, depended on the ways and on the popularity of the party she was attached to; and she was perfectly aware that among the Carews' acquaintance (and she knew no other), Mrs. Hazlewood was thought tiresome, Miss Hazlewood stiff, and Robert Hazlewood silly;

consequently, that it was unlikely any of them should think of joining so little entertaining a party. The Hazlewoods were, moreover, one of those families who, through some unaccountable taste or fatality, invariably contrived to do what was most dull at all times, and to take the least possible share of what was going on, even when stationed in a place dedicated to amusement, and among a crowd employed in enjoying the same.

On the present occasion Mrs. Hazlewood thought "they could not be better placed than where they were actually seated;" so they did not stir towards any other part of the garden, more especially as Miss Louisa was too happily employed in listening to the somewhat prosy discourse of her intended, Mr. Waterfield, to be likely to inspire her mother with any wish to explore the domain, or take a nearer view of that part of the company, who had, from the first, made it their business to see everything that was to be seen in the baron's pleasure-grounds.

Robert Hazlewood was more curious, or more restless, rather; a fact for which Katherine was, to a certain degree, thankful, inasmuch as she was occasionally relieved from the necessity of listening civilly to his inane attempts at conversation, by his sauntering off, to the right or left, 'to see this and that, and return in five or ten minutes, to tell his relations and Miss Desborough all about it. The latter might, at another time, have been amused, both by his vain

endeavours to persuade her to share some of these excursive walks, and by his mother's little manœuvres to induce her to gratify him; but she was just then too much wearied and disappointed for her sense of the ridiculous to keep up her spirits; her feverish longing for Lady Carew's return disposing her more than ever to absence of mind, and quite disabling her from making the best of things as they were. No Lady Carew did return, however. Robert Hazlewood reported that he had seen her at a distance, "larking about," as he expressed it, with the Vicomte de Neyrac, but had not been near enough to speak to her. It followed that Katherine not only spent a considerable time with the Hazlewoods, but had also to sit down to the "collation" prepared under the banqueting tent nearest to them, between the intellectual Robert and an absolute stranger.

At last they rose from table; but matters did not improve as regarded *her* entertainment; for, though she saw many foreign and English friends of the Carews, with whom she was well acquainted, they seemed, she thought, to look on her as Robert Hazlewood's lawful property that day, and either passed before her with a mere bow, or a brief greeting, which they were at no pains to prolong.

Time wore away in this manner, and she felt herself gradually sinking more and more deeply into a "slough of despond," in which it seemed as though her wits, as well as her spirits, were being

speedily reduced to a par with those of her companions. She now made no attempt at assuming an appearance of liveliness, looked listlessly before her, and was presenting to all beholders a perfect picture of gaily-dressed, well set-up "ennui," when, on mechanically raising her eyes from a long contemplation of two blades of grass, she encountered those of Oswald Langton, who stood near, as if watching her, with a smile on his countenance, which grew into something little short of a downright laugh, as he advanced, and said, while shaking hands with her, "So it really is Miss Desborough I see before me?"

"Who else should I be?" asked she, laughing in her turn. "But what is amusing you so very much?"

"To speak the honest truth," replied he, "I am afraid it was your disconsolate aspect that entertained me."

"Am I looking so miserable?" she inquired, with a slight blush. "I am sorry, because one ought not to look doleful in a place like this, if one can help it—only I couldn't help it!"

"I daresay not," said Langton, his eye momentarily glancing on the Hazlewoods, who happened just then to be speaking to some one of their own set of acquaintance. "How long have you been with these people?" added he, in a low voice.

"Almost ever since we first came," answered Katherine.

"Then you stand excused for any amount of cloud on your visage! You had better make your escape now, and come with me to look at the Turkish Kiosk at the end of that walk!"

"Oh, but I wouldn't go there with Robert Hazlewood, before luncheon!"

"That does not signify," said Langton. "You are far more worn out now, and there is no saying what will happen, if you are not given 'change of air and scene!' Come! Mrs. Hazlewood," continued he, aloud, and turning towards that lady, "will have no objection, I'm sure, to Miss Desborough's going with me, to see if she can find Lady Carew, in the direction of the Chinese temple?" And, so saying, he offered his arm, which was accepted before Mrs. Hazlewood could express approbation or the reverse; and they were presently threading their way through the throng, by the path likely to take them quickest out of sight of the party they had left.

"How pleasant it is here!" exclaimed Katherine, with almost a sigh of satisfaction, as they reached a comparatively open spot.

"Yes, pleasanter than where you were just now, I should say," observed Langton.

"But I don't see the Kiosk or the temple," said she. "Where are you taking me to?"

"Not to the Countess Korinski, I give you my word," answered he, smiling. "But," added he, as the crowd thickened, "I fancy we had best

turn our steps towards whatever is the least universal object of attraction; and, in fact, if we *are* to see any of the sights we shall have to talk over to-morrow, I think, though it's a longer space to traverse in itself, we had best go round here, by the back of the flower-garden. You are not sorry to have got away, are you?"

"Oh, I am *so* glad!" cried she.

"I believe," resumed Langton, as they began to tread a path, shaded by clipped elms, where they found themselves almost alone, "I believe I may here ensure you against the approach of either of your bugbears, male or female; neither Robert Hazlewood nor Madame de Korinski are likely to pursue you to this retreat."

"I don't suppose either of them trouble themselves which way I go," said Katherine, slackening her pace; "but it is very delightful to wander quietly in the shade; and I feel more as if I were taking a nice walk in England, than I have done this long while."

"I wish we *were* taking a nice walk in England!" cried Langton, earnestly. "If, instead of this stiff 'charmille,'" added he, stopping, and looking upwards, "there were good tall beeches or well-grown elms over our heads, and smooth turf under foot—it would be pleasant indeed!"

"The 'charmille' is very cool and sheltering, though," remarked Miss Desborough.

"Ah! yes," said he, as they recommenced

their walk; "I see it satisfies you. It gives me a kind of breathless sensation. You are not yet tired of living in France."

"No, I am not; but surely you are not, either; or why should you stay?"

"Why, indeed!" repeated he; "and yet I *am* tired, oh, *how* tired, of this place—of this life! You seem astonished and incredulous," continued he, in answer to a look of his companion's; "and what I say appears so paradoxical, (considering my actions belie it,) that I can't much wonder at your feeling. But the fact is that one's leaving, or enduring a place one is weary of, depends greatly on the nature of the place and circumstances for which one would have to exchange it."

This sounded enigmatical enough; but, as Katherine thought it just possible he might not be on good terms with his father, she did not like to inquire into what might be his exact meaning.

"I am only afraid," she said, after a short pause, "of not being tired enough of Paris, when the time comes for my going home."

"And when are you to go home, Miss Desborough?" he asked, gravely.

"I came for two months; six weeks are now past; so—unless the extension of leave, which Isabella and I wrote to beg for, yesterday, be granted—I shall be taking my lively journey back, under the protection of the Hazlewoods, in about about a fortnight. If—as I hope—I am

allowed to stay on, Isabella has arranged it all delightfully with Lady Mary Shelburne. She says she will be happy to let me be one of her party; and *she* does not return for six weeks certain; —perhaps not so soon."

"I know of one person who will be glad to hear of your returning home," said Langton.

"Do you? I suppose that person is yourself, Mr. Langton," exclaimed she, with a gay smile; "for I think you envy me my being pleased with so many things you are tired of, and would like to have me punished!"

"I see you suspect me of as strong a predilection for inflicting punishments as for bestowing unlooked-for rewards," replied he; "but no, I am not the person to whom your return is likely to give pleasure; at least, not unalloyed. I was thinking of my sister."

"Of Cecilia! Does *she* wish me back? I wonder she should; for she is generally pleased that I should enjoy myself. I don't think I am wanted at home for any reason, either. Has she said so in any of her letters to you? She has not written to me for a long while."

"No: she has not said so; at least, not in the sense you are now supposing. But she *does*, nevertheless, strongly wish for your return to England."

"If I thought that implied any chance of my seeing something of her on going back, I should be very happy," said Katherine; "but, short of

that probability, I can't think why she should wish me to leave a place and a person I like."

"One may sometimes wish something for one's friend, which is not entirely or solely for that friend's pleasure. But I did not ask you to walk away from the Hazlewoods for the purpose of boring you myself; so, without attempting to go deeper into the question of England *versus* France, will you tell me, Miss Desborough, why you speak as if it were impossible that you should see my sister soon after your arrival in England? I fancy she would be but too well pleased, if you would visit her as soon as you have passed a little time with your family."

"Oh, I have no doubt she would; and so should I!" said Katherine, with an arch smile. "But that does not make the matter easier—I should never be allowed!"

"Not allowed!"

"No. It seems odd to you, Mr. Langton, I daresay, that a girl, who is allowed to come to Paris for two months—perhaps for more—to a friend who (as you think) lives too much amongst a—a mixed kind of society, should be hindered from staying at a country house in England with your father and sister. But so it is. I am hardly ever permitted to visit anywhere; yet, through some chance agreement of what suited very different people, I was—inconsistently enough, but fortunately, as it seems to me—given leave to come here."

"I believe I understand," said Langton. "It

jumped with some of your relations' *convenience* that you should do your own pleasure; and it is 'convenience'—as an old friend of my mother's always said—that rules the world. So much the worse for us all!"

Just as he had delivered himself of this opinion, they emerged from between the rows of close-cut trees into the frequented part of the garden, and caught sight of the "Kiosk," which had served as a pretext for their flight from the neighbourhood of the villa itself.

"Shall we go into the little building?" asked Langton; "or shall we content ourselves with out-door admiration?"

"I don't much care," said Katherine; "yet it will seem stupid not to have been in it; so I think . . . ."

But her mind underwent an instant change; for she became suddenly aware that on the top of the steps, leading into the Kiosk before them, stood a little woman, elegantly dressed, who was no other than the Countess Korinski. The same vision, at the same moment, became apparent to Katherine's companion. Both stopped; and the eyes of both turned, instinctively, to the well-known figure of the tall and graceful woman in the black lace shawl and white bonnet, leaning on the arm of the Vicomte de Neyrac, who was closely following her ill-reputed friend.

"You are not astonished, are you, at seeing her in that company?" inquired Langton.

"No," replied Miss Desborough; "for she told

me it was on account of being unable to refuse a walk with her, that she left me with Mrs. Hazlewood."

"Oh—she told you that?"

"Yes; and I know what you are thinking of, Mr. Langton! But though, perhaps, you were right, and I wrong, about my telling her *something* (I ought not to have expected she would mind what I could only tell in such a disjointed way, without personal knowledge or authority!), still, you shouldn't look so contemptuous, as regards her, at least; for her so openly taking part with the countess, however much to be regretted, is not, in *her*, 'obstinacy in ill,' but constancy and steadiness in supporting, 'through good report and bad report,' one of whose innocence she is persuaded."

"I wish I had as good a friend as she has!" ejaculated Langton.

"I am sure she deserves one in me!" said Katherine, warmly.

"Granting she does, there are right few from whom one may expect such zeal as yours, when one takes no heed of their opinions, and goes against their advice."

It is to be supposed that, in spite of the lateness of the hour, the Kiosk was still densely crowded, and that those who had approached it by the steps near the foot of which Langton and Miss Desborough had halted, found it easier to withdraw as they came, than to pursue their way down the

corresponding flight on the other side; for, at this moment, Katherine's eyes met those of Lady Carew, returning with her party.

Katherine fancied that her friend's glance of recognition conveyed, at least, as much displeasure as surprise; and observed "that Isabella seemed very much astonished at her having left the Hazlewoods."

"I daresay she is," replied Langton, drily; "but we must speak a word to this real chaperon of yours, before I restore you to her deputy."

And without waiting to examine the Kiosk or the Chinese Temple, he led her straight up to Lady Carew, saying, "I persuaded Miss Desborough to run away from her immovable friends for a while, in order to see a little of what is going on; will you, if you meet Mrs. Hazlewood, be kind enough to tell her her charge is returning to her by the walk that goes round the encampment?"

"I will, certainly," replied Lady Carew, "if you *are* about to take such a circuit; but it is growing so late, that unless Kate has a very particular fancy for the longest way, I should say it would be better to take the straight path, as *we* shall; for I am going, as soon as the carriage can be found; and we ought to exchange a few words with Mrs. Hazlewood before dispersing."

Katherine declared her willingness to accede to this proposal, Langton bowed his submission, and he and Miss Desborough followed, while Lady

Carew, attended by Neyrac, and the Countess Korinski by young Birkenstein, led the way towards the lawn near the house, up and down which Mrs. and Miss Hazlewood were pacing, escorted by the latter's humble servant.

"So, there you are, Miss Kate!" cried Robert Hazlewood, who was lounging at a little distance from his mother and sister. "You wouldn't go to look about you with me, but you flew away while my back was turned to talk to Noble, and when I looked round again, they told me you were off to the Chinese Temple; that's what I call a very shabby trick!"

At this speech Madame de Korinski laughed, and said something, "sotto voce," to Lady Carew, who cast another sharp, quick glance upon Katherine, but instantly began to defend her to Hazlewood, on the ground of a "woman's privilege;" while his mother, who appeared somewhat hurt, either on his account or her own, took the opportunity of dilating to her late charge on the "disadvantage" it was to a young lady, to be seen so far from any visible chaperon.

"I believe I should have done better to have staid where I was, for everyone seems displeased," said Katherine to Langton.

"They have no business to be so with you," returned he, "and as for me I don't mind it, having had an uncommonly pleasant walk, which is more than one gets every day. But I suppose I must go and see after the carriages now."

He departed accordingly; Madame de Korinski went off in another direction, with her own attendant squire; and Lady Carew stood making civil speeches for herself and Katherine, to Mrs. and Miss Hazlewood, till Langton came back, saying that both their vehicles were within attainable distance. He appeared to have expected to conduct Lady Carew to hers; but as Mr. de Neyrac was already "appointed to the office," and no ways inclined to relinquish it, he offered his arm to Katherine, and followed in silence, till, as he handed her into the carriage, he asked if she were not going to the Opera the next evening, and was answered in the affirmative.

"Is it not the very first time that man has ever seemed to care when or where we were next to meet?" inquired Lady Carew of Katherine, in a rather peculiar tone, as the barouche drove off.

Katherine thought a moment, and said, "She believed it was; but had not noticed herself, before, whether he was or was not in the habit of asking those questions."

Lady Carew then entered on an account of the thousand and one little events and circumstances, which had hindered her coming back in quest of Katherine after leaving her with the Hazlewoods, and expressed keen regret for the weariness to which she had been subjected in consequence.

"You must have had a horrid day of it, Kate!" she exclaimed. "I can't bear to think of it; and all my fault, too!"

"My dear Isabella, I should be quite spoilt if I were always as much amused as you generally contrive I should be! I understand how you were detained, and am quite sorry you should vex yourself about it."

"I can't help being vexed," returned Lady Carew. "But you are a dear creature!" added she, pressing her hand; and the species of displeasure Katherine had previously traced in her countenance and manner, seemed to vanish completely. After some minutes' silence, however, she said, abruptly, "Is Langton making love to you, after all, Kate?"

"Making love! You are surely joking, Isabella! he is much more disposed to quarrel with me."

"L'un n'empêche pas l'autre," said her friend, with a smile, which was not exactly her usual one; "but, in good earnest, I don't think he looks much like a lover; only it just passed through my mind that he might be bethinking himself of Sir Edward's advice, and be trying his chance before you leave me."

"Sir Edward's advice! trying his chance!" repeated Katherine. "What on earth do you mean, Isabella?"

"Oh! nothing of any particular importance, my dear. I thought I told you of it at the time. It was just after you came to us, and when Sir Edward was so full of your first impressions of Paris, and your astonishment at seeing your lovely self in the looking-glass when you waked. You

know it was a long time before he got over that joke; and when he told it to Langton, who, as he knows, is not a Crœsus, he added a something about your 'merit' and your 'fortune,' and how, 'if he were a young man, he should think it a good opportunity,' and more to the same effect; which was really very good-naturedly meant, though perhaps not so very well timed."

Offended pride, and a sense of deep mortification at having been so discussed, made Katherine's cheeks flush violently. She knew, however, that she must repress these feelings, if she would avoid saying that of Sir Edward, which decency forbade her addressing to the woman who had the misfortune of being his wife. She contented herself therefore, with observing, in a tone she did her best to render careless, "that what she had just learnt fully explained that odd, distant sort of manner on Oswald Langton's part, which had at first struck her as so disagreeable. I am astonished, I confess though," continued she, conquering, as she went on, the difficulty with which she had begun to speak, "I *am* astonished at such a mere joke, and from Sir Edward, too, who is always saying the kind of thing, producing such an effect on so very self-possessed a gentleman. One would be almost led to think him not quite such a thorough 'noun substantive' as we believed. His dread of being misinterpreted has been rubbed off now—our first quarrel did that, I suspect—but that is all; for indeed, as you

said yourself just now, he doesn't look much like a lover."

"No," said Lady Carew, "it was a very silly question of mine, and I don't know why I asked it, unless it were to tell Emily that she was mistaken, as I was sure she was at the moment."

"She could not be more so," said Katherine; "but, as I know *you* won't misunderstand me, I may safely tell you that I now think him much more agreeable than I did a fortnight ago."

"Do you?" said Lady Carew, drily; nor did she utter another word during the remainder of their drive home. She professed herself very tired during the rest of the evening; scarcely spoke, and, for the first time since Katherine's arrival in Paris, seemed fretful and ill to please.

"What can be the matter with Isabella?" thought Miss Desborough, as she was undressing. "I see she is vexed with herself because I have had a dull day instead of a pleasant one, which, I fully believe, was more other people's fault than hers; but that is not the whole of it; and there is something strange in her manner, too; I really don't know her to-night! I am sure, quite sure, there is nothing she wishes so much as my amusement; and yet I am *almost* as sure, that she was not exactly pleased when she saw I had escaped, for a time, from the dulness she was all the while reproaching herself for leaving me in. I hope that horrid Countess Korinski has not been saying anything—but no, she couldn't, I should think,

even *invent* anything to alter Isabella's feelings! If I thought, for a moment, there was any change there—but it's all nonsense; the cloud will have passed away to-morrow, and, after all, I daresay I should never have noticed it, if I had not got into the way of believing that Isabella's temper *could* not be ruffled!"

CHAPTER XIX.

Lady Carew's face, as she came for a moment to the door of her guest's apartment, to fetch away little Adela, who had established herself there, as was often her practice in the early morning, did certainly appear thoroughly cloudless, and all within and without seemed to betoken "fair weather." It was, nevertheless, on that day, as Miss Desborough afterwards recollected, that she first witnessed a disagreement, of any consequence, between her host and hostess. Totally uncongenial though they were, the great wealth which enabled both, in a measure, to gratify their respective fancies without clashing, and a sort of non-interference system, which each adopted towards the other, tended to diminish the number of what might have been subjects of contention, as well as to check the disposition to habitual bickerings. But on the present occasion, there was visible anger on the one side, and scornful sullenness on the other, without Katherine's being able to penetrate precisely into the nature and origin of the difference between the pair. It had evidently commenced during breakfast, at which

meal she happened to appear late; and though the contemptuous tone with which the lady was finishing a sentence as she entered the room, changed immediately into that befitting a courteous greeting, and though Sir Edward (who looked, Kate thought, more ugly and more red-faced than she had yet seen him) made a sort of effort to clear his brow, it was impossible not to perceive how matters stood.

"I am so glad to find by the paper," observed Lady Carew, presently, "that it was a false report I was alarmed by yesterday; we *are* to have the 'Muette de Portici;' the pleasure of seeing the thing again, and of showing it to you, Kate, at the same time, were too much for my wisdom, and determined me on going 'coûte que coûte.' I should have been properly provoked if it had been changed for the 'Juive,' for I *do* want to see you pleased this evening, to make amends for the weary day you had yesterday, poor child!"

"I am sorry Miss Desborough hadn't a pleasant day yesterday," said Sir Edward, "very sorry; especially as you made such a point of going there on her account, and you find those things knock you up so! I am sure, last night, you hadn't a word for either of us, you were so worn out!"

Lady Carew did not precisely address an answer *to* him; but she so far gave token of having heard and taken in his remarks, as to observe to Katherine, "that the Baron's fête had been an unlucky one; but that Madame de Rosmond had a party in

prospect, though the day was not yet fixed, to take place at her uncle's, the Marquis d'Armilly's villa, and she expected they should all enjoy *that*."

"I hate 'déjeunés,' and 'fêtes champêtres' myself," resumed Sir Edward; "make it a rule never to go to them; for let them be as magnificent as they will, nothing worth having can ever be served up properly in such a crowd. And I don't see," he continued, as if gravely considering the matter, and in his most prosy, sententious tone, "I don't very well see how they are to answer for young ladies, either; unless, perhaps, when there's an affair very near settled, indeed; then, to be sure, a wandering stroll out of the way of chaperons may settle the case; and when the gentleman is 'caught,' you know, Miss Desborough," added he, waxing facetious as he rose from table, "nobody has a right to make remarks." He moved away towards the door, but stopping as he turned the handle, he said, addressing his wife, "I shall make no decision to-day or to-morrow. I will wait the event, as I proposed to you before. I think that concession ought to satisfy you."

He quitted the room; and Katherine was left to gather the amount of Lady Carew's "satisfaction," from seeing that her face was pale, livid, with inward rage, and with her desperate efforts to conceal it. She felt it was a case where sympathy would be more than unavailing; and without bestowing a second glance on what it pained her inexpressibly to witness, she first busied herself

with giving a little fresh water to some flowers on the mantel-piece, and then, muttering something about Mr. Desanges, escaped to the music-room. When they met again at luncheon, Lady Carew had recovered—wonderfully recovered—and was quite restored to her usual mood when they drove together to the Opera House, where it is to be observed that Oswald Langton *did* join them, though certainly there was nothing in his manner to lead to any farther deduction from the circumstance.

Visits from Mr. de Neyrac and other acquaintances, filled up every pause in the night's entertainment, which Katherine heartily enjoyed. Lady Carew, also, who boasted that on this occasion her play-going head-ache had not attacked her, was in the highest spirits, asserting, as she left the theatre, that she was ready to go anywhere—to a ball, if they had but one to go to!" But in spite of this declaration, they had no sooner driven off, than she threw herself back into a corner of the carriage, as if utterly exhausted, and neither spoke nor seemed to wish to be spoken to, till, as they were approaching the Rue Castiglione, she said, in a tone so eager as to be almost sharp, "When do you think you will get your answer from Wyngate, Kate?"

Now according to the postal arrangements then obtaining, her letter could hardly have yet reached its destination; and as it was probable that those in authority, whichever way they decided, would

take some time in coming to a decision, Kate thought it likely she should have to exercise the virtue of patience for some time longer.

"You don't think they possibly *can* be so ill-natured as to refuse though, do you?" continued Lady Carew. "Are you sure you urged it as strongly as you could?"

"I don't think you need doubt that, Isabella," said Miss Desborough, smiling, as the stopping of the carriage put an end to further conversation.

"She is very unhappy," said Katherine to herself, after she and her friend had wished each other good night. "She will not say so; but it does pain me to see her so unlike herself." Unlike herself Katherine continued to think her; for she was not only apt to be irritable and captious with Sir Edward, but she became unusually eager about all things that could bear the name of amusement, and suddenly determined to go with Katherine to two very small, unpretending evening parties, though it had been long arranged that Madame de Villarceau was to perform the office of chaperon at the one, and Mrs. Hazlewood at the other. She was, on both occasions, the gayest of the gay, as well as the "fairest of the fair;" and, moreover, at Mrs. Harford's (the latter of these parties) Mr. de Neyrac was so visibly the "most devoted of the devoted," that Robert Hazlewood, who might or might not have noticed the fact before, directed Katherine's attention to it by desiring her to "look that way, and tell him if she had ever

seen two people going such a pace?" She looked, without knowing what she was to look at, and saw Isabella Carew accepting the homage of her French admirer, with such unconcealed pleasure as might, well call forth Robert Hazlewood's remark. She turned her eyes quickly away, and the next object they fell on was Oswald Langton, who, as she plainly perceived, was gazing intently upon the pair she could not endure to contemplate. Her own vexation was now doubled, and she was glad when the early dispersion of the small assembly brought them all into the cloak room, where, however, Mrs. Hazlewood, who complained "that she had not been able to get near her all the evening," took possession of her.

"It might be selfishness in her," she confessed, "but she did still hope to have the pleasure of taking her home. She could'nt but think that dear Mrs. Oakly would feel—as she herself would if the case were her own—that she could not spare her child any longer. And, my dearest girl," continued she, laying her hand on hers, and waxing bolder as she felt herself well launched in the "advice-giving" career, "it is the interest that I—that we *all* take in you, which makes me wish to remind you that English people ought not to be *too* long out of England; they begin to lose their English feeling, and then . . . ."

"I am afraid I must tear Kate away from you, for I believe our carriage is waiting," interrupted Lady Carew, who was nearer than Mrs. Hazlewood

thought. And so saying, she passed on, with a somewhat haughty inclination of the head, escorted by Mr. de Neyrac, leaving Katherine to follow with her constant, but unwelcome squire, the intellectual Robert.

The carriage door had no sooner been shut upon the two friends, than Lady Carew burst forth, exclaiming against the impertinent interference of *that* woman, who hated her, as she did everyone who was not as stiff and starch as her own precious daughter! "And she is not the only person—no, not the only one—who wants to cut me off from the best pleasure I have!" continued Lady Carew, in a voice almost choking with passion. "And they will succeed—they will get you to leave me, and then—I don't know what will become of me!"

"My dearest Isabella," replied Katherine, half terrified, "how can you fancy that anything Mrs. Hazlewood could do or say, should have any influence on my actions? You know how entirely I depend upon those at home; and you must feel—even if I had no better reason for wishing to stay—how I should hate travelling with them all—and with Robert, too!"

"Yes, I suppose you would; and I know *you* care a little for me, whatever the rest do. But," continued she, with returning vehemence, "I believe that woman would be quite capable of writing to your mother, to say I am not fit to have the charge of you!"

Such a speech could only be treated as a joke;

but Katherine longed to slide in a something about the impolicy—to say the least—of doing what could not fail to provoke the criticism under which her friend, though affecting to despise it, plainly winced. She felt, however, that any such arguments would be at present useless, and made no reply; only asking herself, again and again, as she had now done for many nights, "What can be the matter with Isabella?"

CHAPTER XX.

The morning after Mrs. Harford's party brought the long looked-for letter, containing full permission "to remain with Lady Carew till Lady Mary Shelburne's return." Katherine rushed into her friend's room with the news, which was received with such rapturous delight, with such expressions of relief after long suspense, as sent Katherine back to her own apartment in a flutter of excited feeling, and happily convinced that now Isabella was at rest on this point, all would be as it was before. And yet—and yet—such is our human inconsistency! — no sooner was she made absolutely sure of the postponement of her return into that state of dulness she so much dreaded, than she became suddenly sensible of an increased longing for the sight of the face—for the sound of the voice—of her sister Annie, to whom, as she almost remorsefully considered, the lengthening of her Parisian visit was likely to be a source of the sorest disappointment. Then, too, let her strive as she would to conceal it from herself, she was, in her heart of hearts, aware, that though her feelings for Lady Carew had lost none of their warmth, she

had now again seen imperfections in her, which rendered her own joy, at the granting of her petition, less thorough than it would have been, could that petition have been wafted over the Channel with a wish, and answered by the same ethereal post. But, after all deduction made, pleasure, and the delightful sense of giving pleasure, predominated; and Katherine's breakfast that morning with Lady Carew (Sir Edward had gone to have his at Tortoni's) was a very happy one.

Nevertheless, after the first effusions of grateful joy at her "reprieve," as she called it, those inequalities of humour, to which Lady Carew had been subject ever since the day of Baron R——'s fête, continued as apparent as during the time of her uncertainty concerning the results of the letter to Wyngate. Her former indifference to her husband's speeches seemed to have vanished, and she exclaimed, the very next day, as he left the breakfast table (after giving utterance to sundry remarks, which to Katherine's ears sounded only prosy and commonplace as usual), "that every word he had been saying for the last half hour, had been dictated to him by some busybody, who had commented to him upon her having wandered about the Tuileries, the day before, with the Countess Korinski and some of her friends."

"I thought," replied Katherine, "that Sir Edward had no objection to her, or to anyone you chose to visit?"

"No—no more he had—and no more he *has;*

except when Lady Mary Shelburne (she is his first wife's cousin, you know) puts it into his head, telling him he ought to 'exert his authority,' and I don't know what more stuff besides! But the fact is," continued Lady Carew, after a pause, during which her countenance recovered its usual calm sweetness, "the fact is, I must every now and then bear with the consequences of my good husband's having the counterbalancing infirmity attached to the character of a thoroughly good-natured man, as you see he is; I suppose I should be too well off else! He is apt to be influenced by the last speaker; and not being able to conceive other people's having less kindness or indulgence than himself, he is sometimes made to fancy that warnings bestowed, as *I* know, out of sheer spite and envy, are prompted, as they profess to be, by sincere interest in him and me. Now, you know, that is a little provoking, and would never do for me to give into! No; if I did, I should soon find myself a slave, not to my husband, but to my step-daughter's uncles and cousins; and *they* have no right to control me, whatever Sir Edward may!"

The sudden ebullition of discontent, with which Lady Carew began, was, as Katherine plainly saw, only too real; how was it with the retractation—the qualification, at least—which followed? Was it principle, or—or—was it a kind of policy, that led her every now and then to praise her husband for his good qualities? and most especially to praise him *then*, when she had been, as it were, transported

into the expression, either in word or tone, of a scorn she was far from admitting in deliberate speech? Was it possible she should ever be able, at any time, to think herself "well off" in belonging to such a man?

"Do *you* think it possible, Madame de Villarceau?" said Katherine to that lady, who was bringing her home, after kindly assisting her with her judgment in the purchase of some French cambric (a commission of Mrs. Oakly's).

The subject had, in one shape or other, been more than once discussed between them, and there was no indiscretion in discussing it now, seeing that Madame de Villarceau evidently knew, as well as Katherine herself, that the atmosphere of the Carews' household had not lately been perfectly serene. They, therefore, talked and differed, and talked on again, without reserve, till Madame de Villarceau's proofs of "what a manageable husband" Sir Edward was, in Isabella's hands, proved likewise, to Katherine's extreme mortification, that *she* had, unknown to herself, formed one of their subjects of dispute!

The facts which Madame de Villarceau's allusions brought out were, in brief and in substance, these: Mrs. Scudamore (Sir Edward's daughter by his first wife) had more than once invited her father to join her at her delightful country house, on the Lake of Geneva; and he, baited partly by the intelligence that his son-in-law had just secured the services of a very scientific cook,

partly by his liking for the large doses of flattery which the Scudamores habitually administered, had determined to accept, and to depart thither about the time when Miss Desborough was, according to the original plan, to have returned home. Lady Carew objected entirely to leaving Paris, pleading, besides, that Mrs. Oakly had been already written to for a prolongation of her daughter's stay. Sir Edward, furious at not having been "previously consulted," had been violent at first, and talked very stoutly of "returning at once to his place and his duties at Moreleigh Abbey, since neither *his* wishes nor *his* feelings were considered;" but he had, nevertheless, knocked under in the main point, with just this salvo to his dignity, that he made his consent to remain in Paris *conditional* upon Miss Desborough's obtaining permission to stay longer with them.

"So you see," continued Madame de Villarceau, perfectly unconscious that, in going over all this, she had in any way *enlightened* her companion, "you see Isabella has won the day. She hates Mrs. Scudamore and the Swiss 'Campagne;' she likes you and the 'Rue Castiglione.' If she gets what she likes, and avoids what she hates, she must not grumble at her so-called lord and master's revenging himself, now and then, by a few provoking speeches; those things are just the 'price of victory.' You know Isabella loves power, and

since she has got it, I think we may believe her when she says she is 'well off.'"

"I suppose we may," replied Katherine, in a somewhat dejected tone; and she argued the point no longer.

It could not be said that any of Madame de Villarceau's communications *proved* Lady Carew to be wanting in the affection which she still, by fits and starts, so warmly expressed; but her want of openness, and the carelessness of her friend's dignity shown in thus forcing her society on her husband, cast a doubt over everything, and led Katherine, most unwillingly, to remember what she had equally learnt from Madame de Villarceau, namely, that the Carews' remaining in Paris for that spring even, had been in some degree connected with her own original invitation. She heartily wished she had been left in ignorance of things which certified her of having been made the subject of a trial of power between her host and hostess, of things which almost drove her to suspect that a part was being played towards herself; a suspicion so odious, that, even while rejecting it, the consciousness of having conceived it was, beyond everything, oppressive. There was no help for it, however. She had implored her mother's permission to prolong her stay; her request had been granted, and she felt, that if she followed her first impulse and declared a change of purpose, she must make up her mind to a quarrel with Isabella, perhaps with Madame de Villarceau, and then—to

fill up the measure of her misfortunes, travel back with the Hazlewoods! Besides, she considered that all arrangements were now made, that the mischief was done and could not be undone, and that to insist on going would, therefore, be simply unkind to Isabella. As to Sir Edward, his good-nature astonished Katherine; for she did think it *very* good-natured in him to continue as well disposed towards her as formerly. It once or twice crossed her mind, indeed, when he was pompously suggesting expeditions to places, "Miss Desborough *ought* to see," that under the apparent good-nature, there might lurk some spiteful intention of punishing his contumacious wife, by and through his zeal for her friend's amusement. She could not be sure; but it certainly was the case, that Sir Edward's advice "to drive Miss Desborough to look at this, or examine that," was often so perversely timed, that she could not wonder at its appearing to increase an irritability, which, albeit not herself the object of it, interfered much with the light-hearted power of enjoyment she had lately possessed. She fancied, moreover—but it was, perhaps, only fancy—that Lady Carew, who had never hitherto seemed to notice particularly what she said, or to whom she spoke, in society at home or abroad, was beginning to observe her rather narrowly, whenever Oswald Langton happened to join their company. Could there be anything in *his* look or manner which invited that observation? She thought not: for though the

question Lady Carew had put to her, as they were driving home from Baron R.——'s, had led to her considering in her own mind whether there could possibly be any ground for the notion, she failed to perceive anything that could account for it, saving the simple fact that Langton liked her company better now he had become really acquainted with her. There was nothing, she thought, very amazing in this; she herself—albeit not entirely satisfied with him, when looking on him as Cecilia's favourite brother, liked him infinitely better than formerly, because, though what little conversation had passed between them since Baron R.——'s fête, had been of a general and ordinary nature, he now spoke as if he cared to listen to what she might have to say in return. She thought it a perfectly comprehensible change on both sides, and wondered that a woman of the world, like her hostess, should either attach importance herself to what was so easily explicable, or should fancy *her* missish and common-place enough to think she was "particularly attended to," because a man of her acquaintance, after totally disregarding her, had once or twice thought it worth while to converse with her. She supposed that her original expressions of the kind of dislike she had felt towards him, had been stronger than she meant; so strong as to render her present alteration of feeling and demeanour very striking. However it was, it annoyed Katherine to suspect herself watched, and doubly annoyed her to

be in dread lest her countenance should ever betray her suspicion. This was another check upon the freedom with which, not ten days back, every thought of her heart had been poured out to her friend! *Now* an invisible barrier seemed to be rising between them, and Katherine began sorrowfully to confess to herself, that there was, on both sides, such a diminution of confidence, that the "indifferent subjects," which society supplies, had come to be a very necessary help in conversation. The best "indifferent subject" now on hand was a projected expedition to St. Cloud, in combination with a dinner at one of the pretty villas at Bellevue, now occupied by a wealthy relation of the Hazlewoods, for whom this "farewell party" was made up, preparatory to their departure for England. It was an affair in which all were included; the discussion of it filled up many a pause in conversation; and the expectation of a pleasant day, in a beautiful place she had not yet seen, diverted Katherine's thoughts from much, which, without something agreeable to look forward to, must have proved depressing, and even wearying to her, at the present moment.

CHAPTER XXI.

KATE Desborough sat alone, not many days after receiving her "extension of leave," in the so-called music-room, appropriated to her morning employments. She had just been given a note from her drawing-master, apologizing for his inability to attend her that forenoon; and she now lay back in her chair, almost in as listless an attitude as when, two months back, she waited in the library at Wyngate, for the coming of Cecilia Langton. There could not, however, exist a greater contrast than between the "still life" of crowded bookshelves and simple furniture, which there formed the back-ground to her reposing figure, and the magnificence which here surrounded her; emblematic, in some degree, of a corresponding change in life and habits. Katherine's eyes rested upon a splendid looking-glass, a few yards from her, which reflected, not herself, but the folding doors communicating with the drawing-room, one leaf of which had been inadvertently left open by the hurried domestic who had brought her Mr. Desanges's note. This accident, by extending the range of view, and calling out upon the large

mirror a repetition of the rich and tasteful ornaments of the larger apartment, certainly threw over the smaller one an air of greater splendour than it habitually presented in the morning, when, to ensure Miss Desborough's studies against interruption, those doors were invariably kept closed. Katherine, however, had hardly noticed the circumstance that produced the change, neither was she engaged in admiring the result; for though her eyes were plainly showing her the reflection of the Florentine vase of grapes supported by Dolphins, at the end of the adjoining room, her mind was dwelling upon very different things. She was remembering, that within that half hour, she had experienced more of what was painful and disagreeable, both in word and look, from her hostess, than she had yet been tried with, or than she could, even a week back, have deemed possible.

It was not that Lady Carew, at any time, overstepped the actual bounds prescribed by politeness; but she had, in the last day or two, taken up a way of lamenting her own "isolated position"—her "inability to inspire sympathy," etc., etc., in a manner which almost implied contempt for any consolation her companion might attempt to offer. Katherine had, nevertheless, that morning exclaimed against this complaint of not inspiring sympathy, eagerly declaring her own wish "to know and share the griefs, whatever they might be, that preyed on her beloved friend." But Lady Carew had repulsed her coldly—almost haughtily

—saying, "that she desired no sympathy from one who did not—could not—understand her." After the glance of unfeigned astonishment which these words called forth, an endeavour was made to explain—to laugh them away; but so artificially, so unsuccessfully was it done, that, far from effacing the painful impression created, it barely prevented that sort of investigation which must have produced a quarrel; and Katherine had gladly availed herself of the striking of a quarter by a neighbouring clock, as a signal that she ought to go and prepare for the master to whom that morning was to be devoted. She now knew she was not to expect him; but she remained seated where she was when the note of apology had been put into her hands, striving vainly to account for the strange unkindness shown her by one who had, only yesterday, so warmly—so vehemently—thanked her "for giving her the solace—the comfort—of her society for some poor six weeks longer!" But the more she pondered, the less she could divine the clue to conduct so extraordinary. She only knew that this uncertainty—this variableness of demeanour, rendered her most unhappy.

She rose, went to the window, and, looking out upon the Tuileries gardens, the sight of their freshness and beauty filled her with a keen wish to give her perturbed mind that temporary distraction sometimes afforded by the breath of the free air, by the loveliness of sun and shade, on a summer morning.

"If I were at Wyngate," sighed she, "I should be out under the trees, the instant I felt it might be pleasant to walk beneath them! But here, though that garden is almost as near as our own is to my dear little library, it is useless to me, for I may not wander there alone, and I have no mind to go back to Isabella's boudoir and ask her to go out with me. Would I were in some forest as lonely as this place is gay and populous! But I must swallow my tears as I best can; for I have promised to stay here, and must go through with my sojourn uncomplainingly." As she came to this determination to endure, she turned her eyes away from the window, and again fixing them mechanically upon the large mirror opposite the door opening into the next room, she saw therein reflected, not only the long vista of splendid furniture and decorations, but the figure of Oswald Langton, apparently stopping on his way through the adjoining saloon. She started at the sudden apparition; and, glancing quickly round to ascertain its cause, beheld, in the doorway, Langton himself, who, coming forward instantly, said, as he greeted her, "that he concluded, from finding her alone, that Lady Carew was out."

"I don't think she is," said Miss Desborough, hastily composing her countenance.

"Well, if she *is* at home, I shall probably have the pleasure of seeing her in a few minutes; and in the meantime I have the advantage," added he, looking out on the Tuileries, "of seeing what a

pretty view you have, Miss Desborough, from your studious retreat here. It is decidedly the best side of the house."

"Yes, it is very pretty," assented she, in an indifferent tone.

"But you don't seem much pleased with its prettiness," observed he, noticing her spiritless air and swelled eyelids.

"One isn't always in a mood to enjoy a gay look out," returned she.

"No," said Langton, "one is not—not even," proceeded he, with ironical emphasis, "not even when that look out is in Paris, on the Tuileries! You can't think it a terrestrial Paradise for ever. Are you home-sick, Miss Desborough?"

"That would be too strong a word for what I feel," she replied, "but—I suppose it was something of that nature which passed through my mind just now, as I thought how pleasant it would be for *those* to be the Wyngate trees, and for me to walk out under them this minute, without my bonnet!"

"Without your bonnet! that's a condition of happiness hardly to be fulfilled in these parts; otherwise I should be too much honoured, by escorting you towards whichever 'allée' you prefer, though *I* too would give more for a ramble at Wyngate! But you are soon to return there, where your soul was carrying you, are you not?"

"Yes, but not *so* soon as I had supposed possible; for my visit here *is* to be lengthened."

"Indeed! how much? How long do you stay on here?"

"Certainly till Wednesday six weeks, if the Shelburnes' plans do not alter."

"Wednesday six weeks!" repeated he. "Why, you will have staid nearly double the time you originally came for!"

"Have you any objection?" asked she, smiling involuntarily at his somewhat ungallant appearance of disappointment.

"Objection! no, that's not it; and if you were a Frenchwoman, or a young lady of the true 'young lady' cut, I should have to say something pretty, disclaiming first, and then protesting all sorts of things, no doubt. But you don't like—dont want—'pretty things,' so I need not throw them away on you! Can't you believe the truth, that I should be glad—glad, at all cost, to know you were in your home again?"

These words, enigmatical as they sounded, were said too earnestly, with a look and tone too opposite to that of satirical banter, for her to reply in jest, and she said:

"I would fain believe everything you tell me, Mr. Langton; but, though you are right in not troubling yourself to make pretty speeches, I should be really glad to know, to understand, your grounds for expressing yourself as you do, as you have done before now; especially as, supposing the Carews' set to be——what you have called it, you know that I am able—am permitted—entirely

to avoid the company of those within its circle who are chiefly objectionable."

"Yes, you have been stiff about the Korinski, and you are right."

Having said this, he remained silent, as if there had been no more for him to say; and Katherine observed, rather impatiently, "that she was glad he thought so, but that he had given her no answer."

"I cannot immediately," replied he, with a look of displeased embarrassment, but without attempting to move, or change the conversation.

"Then if you cannot, you must excuse my attaching the importance you seem to expect, to expressions and advice, which could, I think, be only justified by your knowing me to be living under the actual protection, in the daily companionship—of persons you thought downright ill of."

Katherine blushed as she spoke, and it seemed that her confusion was infectious, for Langton's face flushed to such a crimson as she had never yet seen dye his cheeks and forehead, while he answered, in a slow measured tone, "that such *could* not of course have been the jet of what had escaped him."

"But it is nevertheless true," continued he, with a sort of repressed vehemence, "that what I have said to you *has* grounds, though I believe they appeared frivolous to you when I tried to urge them once before. You were ready then with an argument which seemed to make against me; you reminded me of my sister's visiting this city last year. But it is one thing to spend a month in

Paris, if one likes to see sights, and take notice of this and that which is different from what we have at home, and quite another to live on in idleness and pleasure where one has neither ties nor duties, in short, to spend one's days and nights as the English residents in Paris habitually spend theirs! You are not displeased with me, Miss Desborough?"

"No, not displeased; for, strange as your views are, I believe you are sincerely persuaded of them as regards me."

"Then will you—more particularly as I fancy it will cost you less now than it would have done a fortnight back—will you enable me to say, when I write this afternoon to my sister, that your stay here is *not* prolonged—that you will return at the time, by the opportunity, originally contemplated?"

"You are really very anxious to get rid of me," cried she, unable to repress a somewhat sarcastic smile.

"That's all you know about the matter," was his muttered observation, without appearing to notice which she proceeded to say, "that she had promised Lady Carew to remain with her for the next six weeks, and therefore could not authorise him to give Cecilia the information he proposed."

"Then you stay," said Langton, moodily. "I am sorry for it."

"Mr. Langton," returned she, scarcely able to control the irritation his strange conduct excited, "I am willing to think your advice well meant; but it is . . ."

"Impertinent, you would say," interrupted he.

"Not impertinent, if grounded and explained," continued she; "but no explanation is given, and while you so solemnly denounce this life of busy idleness and lounging vanity, you don't consider yourself harmed by one just as unprofitable."

"Do I not?" replied he, gloomily. "As I said before, you know little of the matter. It *has* harmed—it *does* harm me! Day by day it corrupts and corrodes my whole being. If you think me unconscious of that, you are mistaken. Don't tax me with inconsistency; or, rather, call me inconsistent if you will—inconsistent in the sense of wishing to see you retain qualities, which are fast rusting out of my own soul, or which only so far exist as to enable me to love and admire in others what I would fain have been myself, were not man's passions strong, and his resolutions weak. The love and the admiration are vain—are tantalizing; but I must grow worse than I have yet become, to wish not to feel them!"

Katherine listened to this speech with painful surprise; there was something so composed and steady in Langton's usual manner, so much of habitual reserve in all that touched his personal feelings and views, that any departure from his custom was the more striking; while, at the same time, the tone of genuine emotion with which he spoke, forbid any suspicion of hypocrisy.

"If you are not seeking to mystify me for some inconceivable end," said she, after a pause; "or

if, on the other hand, you are not belying yourself by the use of stronger language than the actual truth warrants, I should be inclined, Mr. Langton, to take on myself your part of adviser, and to say —to say earnestly and fervently—tear yourself, with all speed, from a place, from a society, which you have found so beset with temptations! It is never too late—surely not so for whoever retains the sense and the love of what is good and noble. Only we must hasten, we must strive, ere we have lost all strength for the strife—be the chain that binds you what it will, lose no time in breaking it!"

"In breaking it!—in casting it from me!" murmured he, his eyes fixed on the ground. "That is easily proposed. But will you help me? will you raise me out of the depths I have sunk into?" asked he, fixing his eyes keenly on hers, and drawing closer to her side.

"It is God alone who can help and raise those who desire to be freed from the bonds of evil!" replied she, trembling violently. "But, in so far as I can avail, how gladly would I assist—take my part—in leading any human creature towards what I feel and know to be the better path!"

"Of course," cried he, bitterly, "every virtuous and religious-minded woman is ready to do that for everyone; but if it is only as your 'fellow-creature' that you favour me with these good wishes—if you would only do for me what you would do as willingly for the beggar in the street,

supposing he would listen to you—why, perhaps I am very wrong, but I don't feel greatly encouraged to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil, with my single arm."

"With your single arm it would be vain indeed," said Katherine, raising her eyes. "But you can find other aid, other weapons; and," proceeded she, on seeing him shake his head in answer, "since you cling so much to human sympathy, I can tell you, most truly, that I feel something more of interest in what concerns my dearest friend's brother, than for those in whose behalf a sense of duty only calls on me to do the little I can."

"Then, for Cecilia's sake, I am rather more to you than any other individual, Robert Hazlewood included, who has the advantage of your acquaintance?"

"You certainly are, but you seem dissatisfied; is not such an interest sufficient?" asked she.

"For ordinary purposes it is, as it ought to be, no doubt; but, for extraordinary ones, something more is wanted."

"How do you mean?" she inquired.

"I mean," he continued, "that what you allow me is fully sufficient for rendering such intercourse, as I am permitted with you, pleasant and enlivening; but, for a man, who should deliberate the wrenching himself from out of the dominion of past habits, the changing his course of life and motives of action . . ."

He stopped short, almost as if breath failed him, and Katherine exclaimed:

"Oh, don't deliberate! Change them, for God's sake, at once, if they have been faulty!"

"Say that again!" cried he, eagerly; "or, rather, don't say it again—but, tell me—tell me quick—that when you have left this place, and I have left it, too—as, I trust, may yet befall—if then we meet some day in England, you will remember . . ."

But he was interrupted by the entrance of Lady Carew, who, after looking for a moment in astonishment at him and Katherine, turned away, as to leave the room, while she said, angrily:

"Something seems being urged very vehemently! I will not disturb any one."

"Oh, don't go, Isabella!" cried Miss Desborough, starting forward. "Don't fancy . . ."

"I am not to fancy, am I, that I have broken in on a more interesting conversation than would have passed, had I been here?" asked she, with a look of scornful indignation she appeared unable to restrain.

Langton answered, steadily, "that an interesting conversation—interesting to him, at least—*had* been passing, inasmuch as he had been trying—he knew not with what success—to persuade Miss Desborough that she would act wisely in not too much prolonging her stay abroad. In fact," added he, "I have been venturing to give the advice which I told you, the other evening, at Mrs.

Harford's, I should take the risk of some day offering to your friend. You know my opinions on the subject; I cannot, I believe, expect you to share them, tending, as they do, to deprive you, for the present, of Miss Desborough, so that I naturally chose the moment of your absence to set them forth without contradiction. But I have given you warning; and when you next grant me the honour of an undisturbed conversation, I do not despair of convincing you that I could hardly, in honour and straightforwardness, have acted otherwise."

He bowed, and was retiring; Lady Carew repeated the words "honour and straightforwardness" in a tone of bitter irony, while he, rushing back from the doorway to pick up a glove which lay on a chair, close to Katherine, muttered rapidly, as he brushed by her, "We must have this out yet."

When the door had closed on him, Lady Carew turned sharply to Miss Desborough, who had stood like one petrified during Langton's explanation, and asked "if there was a word of truth in what that man had said?"

"Yes," replied Katherine, "what he said is true; but I did not know he had ever spoken to you on the same subject."

Lady Carew took no notice of her last observation; but after some moments of silence said contemptuously:

"I suppose it *was* true, as far as it went. And

you kept telling me he did not make love to you!"

"I told you the truth when I said so, Isabella," answered Katherine, colouring highly; "for, when you asked me that question—you know when—Mr. Langton had not done a thing, said a word, leading me to believe myself an object of peculiar interest in his eyes."

"In short, I put the notion into your head?" inquired Lady Carew, sarcastically.

"Well, I believe I might almost say so," replied Miss Desborough, hesitatingly.

"You will hardly answer me now as you did ten days back—hardly tell me, *now*, he has never made love to you?"

"No, not exactly; for, though I should still say what is *literally* true, yet I might mislead you, because—because—I cannot deny that some things he said to-day *did* give me the feeling of his having a particular interest—of his wishing for my sympathy—of his caring for me, in fact, notwithstanding that it would be hardly in my power to repeat what it was that gave me the impression; and, after all, it is possible I may be mistaken."

"Very possible," said Lady Carew, coldly. "But what *did* he say? so far as you can recollect?"

"It was the sense of what he had said before; only he added, when I wondered why Paris should be good for him and bad for me, a sort

of indistinct confession that it was injurious to himself, and then some incoherent wishes for assistance and encouragement from me to help him to break loose from . . . He did not clearly express what."

"Indeed? He couldn't well go into further particulars," said Lady Carew; "and it was cool enough to hint at such things. He must have thought you more indulgent, on those kinds of chapters, than *I* have been in the habit of considering you."

"Indeed! indeed!" cried Katherine, almost overpowered with confusion, "I must have given you a very wrong notion of what he said, for you to think that!"

"Perhaps so," returned Lady Carew; "but, let the occult signification of his discourse be what it will, I look on Mr. Langton as meddling and impertinent to the last degree, in endeavouring to influence your actions, especially after your promise to stay with me; and I shall so order matters that there may be no recurrence of these unpleasant, unauthorized discussions, which put you in a very embarrassing situation, to say the least. Will it disappoint you very much, Kate, if we give up the party to St. Cloud to-morrow?"

It was utterly impossible for Miss Desborough to pretend that it would not; but, after a moment's reflection, she said:

"If you think it better not to go there, Isabella, I would not, for the world, be the means of doing

what you dislike or wish to avoid; but I should tell you I let Mr. Langton know that I considered myself engaged to remain six weeks longer with you, and never gave him the smallest reason to expect I should alter my intention."

"You were quite right," returned Lady Carew; "for he is a man who, if you grant him an inch, takes an ell. It will be better, I am sure, that we do not go to St. Cloud to-morrow; for, to speak the honest truth, my dear child, though I should not mind braving the wrath of all your uncles, aunts, and cousins, for encouraging a man who was *worth* quarrelling about, it's what I won't do for Langton. He doesn't deserve it."

"I don't *know*," said Katherine, "that he wants 'encouraging' in the way you mean; I might, as I said just now, have mistaken the feeling."

"It was not exactly 'feelings' I was thinking of," interrupted Lady Carew, "but of Sir Edward's good advice, which, as I see, was not given in vain."

"I don't think," replied Katherine, colouring, "that, whatever else he may be, he is the sort of man to marry for money."

"Not to sell himself, no; not to do anything odious or ridiculous for money; but, if he ever does marry, he will not let himself go cheap, you may be sure."

"Tell me, Isabella," said Katherine, rather more earnestly than she was conscious of, "are

you aware of anything that renders him so decidedly undeserving?"

"I have no right to accuse him of anything particular," was her answer, after a short pause. "You know," proceeded she, recovering her usual easy manner and serene smile as she went on, "one rarely learns anything certain about the private history of the more prudent members of one's acquaintance! Nor is he, I daresay, more undeserving, in himself, than most men. But he does not deserve *you;* that is undoubted, inasmuch as he has neither a heart to give to Kate Desborough, nor a rent-roll to shew to her uncles."

Having concluded this speech, and stated these facts, which she assumed to be incontrovertible, Lady Carew left the room.

Katherine's first impulse was to run after her, and ask why she asserted, so decisively, "that Langton had no heart to give her;" but she checked it, saying to herself, "It would be betraying too much interest—more than may, perhaps, ever be justified. I will not ask her again! I don't know why I should care! And yet I *do* care; for after what has passed, I can't help feeling curious—anxious—to know the root of what seems so strange!"

Katherine's resolution not to betray this anxiety only served to stimulate the busy workings of her own mind. Isabella had said "that Langton had no heart to give." On what ground? Might she suspect, with good reason, that it was already be-

stowed so unworthily, as to render the very pretence of its being offered to *her* an insult? "No, it cannot be," said she to herself, "Isabella would have told me *that* when I asked her if she knew anything against him! She wishes me to dislike him, and she must be sensible that nothing could contribute more surely, more effectually, to that end, than giving me such a proof, that, if he were seeking to interest me at all, it would be from the mercenary motives she suspects him of!"

This hypothesis being rejected, she wondered, in vain, what could have occasioned the prejudice Lady Carew had thus lately taken up against one she had not long ago professed to like, unless it were sheer and mere dread of affronting the Desborough family, a chance which she would once have enjoyed taking, from the mere pleasure of defying them.

"It is very unlike her old self," thought she; "but not more so than her marrying Sir Edward, with whom she declares herself so 'well off'—though I doubt her having brought her feelings into such complete unison with her position as she would sometimes have me think! This very morning she complained of 'isolation'—'unhappiness'—*I* could not understand or enter into—yet she would not like me to pity her for being Sir Edward's wife! She puzzles me almost as much as Cecilia's brother does! He seemed so eager to say a few words more—but, after all, if he does really wish to take up to-day's talk where he left

it, he will find a time and a place, though we should *not* meet to-morrow, as he expects."

Katherine had just reached this conclusion when, being informed that "luncheon was ready," she left the music-room for the dining-room, where her hostess met her with an unruffled brow, and an apparent determination to make a forget of past events.

CHAPTER XXII.

The conversation at luncheon was chiefly kept up by Lady Carew's asking Katherine to help her to enumerate the various pieces of shopping business to be despatched (if possible) that afternoon—to decide which purchases or commissions must be performed without delay, and which might afford to be left till the morrow. Lady Carew seemed anxious to efface, by her kindness of manner, whatever unpleasant effect the late scene might have produced, and Katherine did her best to show herself correspondingly ready to lay aside all remembrance of it. In this she succeeded pretty well, and they had just adjourned to the drawing-room for a few minutes, before preparing for a busy drive from "magasin" to "magasin," when they were somewhat surprised by the entrance of Sir Edward, who, as has been observed, was not often to be seen at home between the hours of breakfast and dinner. His early return had been caused by his sudden recollection of an error in the manner of serving a newly-invented sauce, which had occurred at table the previous day, and of which he had forgotten

to take notice in the morning. He had therefore bestirred himself to repair the neglect in time to prevent the repetition of it; and, being at home, and in one of his most fussy and important moods, he came into the drawing-room to ask his wife, for the fiftieth time, "at what precise hour the Bellevue people dined next day?"

"I should like to see the card," continued he; "for, as I don't patronise the St. Cloud part of the story, and, as I am thinking of offering to take Seebright with me in the brougham, I wish to name the hour correctly. Does the coachman know the britschka will be wanted for a country excursion to-morrow?"

"No," replied Lady Carew, as she handed him the card; "for it's not certain that we go on the excursion; it will be time to settle that to-morrow," added she carelessly.

"Not certain!" repeated Sir Edward; "why, this morning you and Miss Desborough were talking of nothing but the party to St. Cloud! And do you cut the dinner as well?"

"The whole affair, most likely," returned she, in an off-hand manner.

But Sir Edward observed, peremptorily, "that, as regarded the *dinner*, it was not fair to the Westmeres to leave things uncertain. If she had really given up the notion of going, she must write at once. But," proceeded he, looking round at Katherine, "what says Miss Desborough to this change of measures?"

"Kate feels as I do, that there is nothing so odious as sight-seeing in a crowd. The fact is," proceeded she, "I had no idea, till this morning, that we were to be tacked to such an overpoweringly large party. We shall go by ourselves, or with one or two friends, snugly, some other day, and in the meantime I will, since you desire it, scratch off my excuses to Lady Westmere at once."

Sir Edward shrugged his shoulders, and said, "As you please;" adding, after about a minute's silence, "that it *did* surprise him, when she had been so anxious to stay in Paris for the sake of Miss Desborough's seeing the various palaces and out-of-town sights in a pleasant way, that she should be now so fanciful and fine, as to turn her back on the opportunity of showing her St. Cloud and Bellevue with a merry party, which, in his day at least, had been reckoned more than half the battle on such occasions."

"A party may be too merry; too noisy, at any rate, may it not, Kate?" said his wife, appealing to her, with a calm smile.

Katherine made no reply; and Sir Edward went on to inquire "whether there were any objectionable individuals attached to the party in question? I should not have thought so," concluded he, "as Mrs. Hazlewood makes one of it."

"Objectionable, no, not that I am aware of; there is Madame de Rosmond's Pole, who is a cool hand, rather; and there's that Italian, John Shelburne patronises. Not that I want to make them

out as objections to any party they are members of; but the whole thing's a bore, as I have told you, and we have settled to give it up."

"Does Miss Desborough think it as great a bore as you do?" asked Sir Edward, whose lurking love of teasing had been excited by his wife's caprice. "I would lay two to one she would be glad to go, if the truth were known!"

He looked at her as he spoke, and Katherine, unable to keep silence longer, said "she had not originally disliked the idea of the party, but had quite given it up, and could well wait for a more quiet occasion of going over the palace, which she allowed might, in some respects, be more agreeably accomplished with a smaller number of visitors."

"Ah, just so," muttered the old gentleman, "that is very prettily said; but I am not mistaken for all that, and the change of plans will disappoint many."

He now pushed his chair nearer his wife's, and addressed to her, with a knowing look, something that Katherine could not catch; but Lady Carew twitched her handkerchief impatiently, saying, "Nonsense!" and her husband drew his seat back again, giving it as his opinion in an audible whisper, "that it would be no bad thing for either."

"Not that *I* ever meddle in such matters," continued he, rubbing his hands as he spoke, "only I gather, from what Lady Mary tells me, that the absence of *both* ladies will be thought a

great take-off from to-morrow's pleasure. It's not much of an expedition, for the sort of thing," resumed he presently, in a musing tone. "One has not to get up at six for it, and it makes a great difference when all is to wind up properly, as it will at the Westmeres'. Sir Philip had his 'chef' from the 'Rocher,' I know; so it strikes me—what should you say, Miss Desborough, to having me for your chaperon, as you have often had me at the play? I have not said a word to Seebright yet about the place in the brougham, and it's only ordering it early, and leaving the britschka here for Isabella to amuse herself her own way. You have no objection, have you?"

Now, without actually looking at Lady Carew, Katherine was aware that a black cloud had darkened her face at this proposal, and she hesitated, doubtful how she should so contrive her reply as to avoid giving a cause of quarrel to a pair who seemed ready to take up the first that offered.

"Ah, you don't know how to accept, when you have vowed you don't care about the thing!" said Sir Edward. "But you will go to oblige *me*, won't you, Miss Desborough? and I'll engage to look the other way, if you and Bob Hazlewood get very tender over your farewells!"

The sly glance he cast at her increased her confusion, but before she could frame any answer, his wife exclaimed:

"I don't know what is come to you, Sir Edward.

You who never go anywhere except to a dinner! I suppose you have some reason—to me unfathomable—for thinking it necessary we should go! and if that be the case, though you don't condescend to explain why, rather than you should put yourself so much out of the way, and rather than give the appearance of having myself a personal dislike to any of the company, I will even go, bore as it is; and, though I have no idea it will be particularly pleasant, it is not, as you say, a long expedition, and will be soon over, so we'll say no more about it. I have made up my mind now to go, and I hope you are satisfied, Sir Edward!"

"Satisfied! I conclude you are satisfied yourself, my dear," replied he; "it was free to you to let me go in your place; whence I gather that you have thought better of it, and consider, on the whole, that you are as likely to have a pleasant day of it this way as any other. You are not in the habit of giving in to please your neighbours only! So it remains, does it, that you start early, and I join you at dinner, with Seebright?"

"Yes it does," replied she, drily.

He left the room a few minutes after, and no sooner had the door closed on him, than she exclaimed:

"Those are the thanks one always gets for yielding up one's inclination! One is supposed to do what one likes best one's self, at bottom!"

"I can't think, Isabella, why you should feel obliged to go on this party; do not, pray, let

yourself be dragged into it on my account; I will go and tell Sir Edward that I prefer . . . ."

"It's no use telling Sir Edward anything!" interrupted Lady Carew, "and, if knowing that will quiet your mind, it is *not* on your account I am going; I am come to the conclusion, that, on some grounds, it is best for myself, and I shall manage as I can with regard to certain awkwardnesses and disagreeables."

Katherine supposed that this last speech referred to Langton; but forbore all inquiry, and retiring to her own apartment, prepared herself for the mixture of shopping and driving in which the afternoon was to be spent. Their business was hurried, at last, by the necessity of returning to dress for one of Sir Edward's small dinner parties, which, enlivened as it was, by the presence of Mr. de Neyrac, and of both Mr. and Madame de Villarceau, provided Miss Desborough, as well as Lady Carew, with too much "duty," in the matter of entertaining guests, etc., to admit of any farther allusion to the adventures of the day.

It was not till Katherine found herself in the solitude of her own chamber, that she had again leisure to ponder over the pain and embarrassment brought upon her, by the singular conduct of her hostess and of her visitor. It was difficult to say which had been strangest in demeanour—most inconsistent in action. Was it Oswald Langton, who conjured her to shorten a visit, that retained her in the same city with himself, as though some

nameless evil there threatened her; and then, almost in the same breath, called on her for *her* sympathy—*her* present help against temptation, as if his salvation depended on her granting them? Or was it Isabella, who, loving her at bottom, had yet, that morning, repelled the proffered tokens of her affection; and, in her irritation at Langton's "interference," afterwards, had vented her anger in contemptuous words and looks to *her*, whose prolonged stay she still so eagerly desired? Might it be—she had thought so once before, and rejected the notion as absurd—might it be that the Countess Korinski was, in some unfathomable way, the secret cause of so much that was incomprehensible? She remembered, with a mixture of gratification and of painful regret, how happy she was with Isabella—how perfect had been the unison of their every feeling—till the Countess Korinski's return from her visit in Normandy. It was not, Katherine knew, at all improbable that the story of her own refusal to accept her as chaperon, and consequent invitation by Mrs. Charlemont, might have reached Madame de Korinski a very few hours after it had been communicated to herself. "If so, she would hate me—hate Langton yet more; and, if so . . ." Here the regular train of thoughts, which composed her reverie, broke short, as beads are dispersed on the breaking of the thread on which they are strung; and her mind fluttered backwards and forwards, from one contradictory notion to

another, without bringing her to any conclusion. There was very little to dwell on but what was disagreeable; and it was especially disagreeable to have been made the instrument which had forced Isabella into going on the very expedition she so particularly wished to avoid. Her cheeks tingled at the recollection of Sir Edward's odious jokes; and she wished she had been able to say this, and answer that, in proper time. But—but, if the truth must be known, Kate Desborough was not —could not make herself—sorry for the result. She was "curious"—"anxious"—to learn whither tended those expressions of deep and passionate feeling, interrupted by the entrance of Lady Carew. She only wished (she thought) to understand—to appreciate—there was no reason why she should examine herself more searchingly yet. But the more unjustly disdainful had been her hostess' manner in speaking of Langton, the more disposed was she to believe it possible that Cecilia's brother *had* a heart to give her, and was not the sheer and mere worldling Isabella took pleasure in constantly denominating him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE morning rose bright and cloudless, as if purposely to favour the enjoyment of those who had selected the day for that sort of amusement, which is the most dependent upon accidents of weather and temperature. These had combined in so happy a degree, as to ensure the first and most momentous condition of a "party of pleasure;" and their influence contributed, indirectly (even before the business of the day began) to produce the second necessary element of such a party's success, namely, a previous disposition in the minds of those composing it, to be pleased themselves. Such, at least, was the effect on Katherine's spirits, when she threw open the window to inhale the fresh breeze, and look hopefully on the clear blue sky. "We shall have a charming drive, if that were all!" thought she, while dressing; and although this very anticipation of the drive brought Isabella at once before her, her conduct of the preceding day, and the puzzling changes in her demeanour towards herself, it is certain that all these painful things seemed less painful than twelve hours before—

struck her less as an actual alteration in the nature and feelings of her hostess—and more as the consequences of ruffled temper, in one whose equanimity was, perhaps, a good deal more hardly tried than she, even, had means of knowing.

In appearance, at all events, Lady Carew's mood was now as full of sunshine as the morning itself. Having made up her mind to go to St. Cloud, she seemed to have also determined to look on the expedition as she had done two days back; that is, as one likely to provide her with entertainment of various kinds; and, impossible as it might be for Katherine absolutely to blot what had passed from the tablets of her memory, still, as she drove by her friend's side through Passy and Auteuil, in the pleasantest of open carriages, on a bright but breezy day of early summer, she felt no more, for the time being, of that melancholy, verging on home-sickness, which had laid a temporary hold on her. She no longer wished to be at Wyngate, as she had done the morning before; for the sense of wounded affection which had prompted that wish, albeit still existing, was in great measure neutralized by the eager desire of learning, there where she was, the past history, the present feelings of the man whom she had, three weeks back, found too uninteresting to be always able to remember with patience that he was a friend's brother. The pre-occupation was not, however, of so absorbing a nature as to interfere with her power of observing and noticing

what was around her, and she chatted gaily with her companion, as Sir Edward's fine English bays carried them swiftly through the "Bois de Boulogne," to their journey's end, the entrance of the domain of St. Cloud.

The Shelburnes and Villarceaux were already getting out of their carriages; and as Lady Carew and Katherine drove up to the outer gate, they beheld Langton standing before it, as if in waiting.

"This is a perfect morning for our day's business," said he, as he joined the ladies, adding, in a low voice, while shaking hands with Katherine, "a sort of fright had come over me lest you should have been kept at home."

He was about to offer her his arm, but Lady Carew stopped Katherine, and made her turn round to speak to the Hazlewood party, who, having arrived but a minute or two later, were now just behind them.

During the greetings which ensued, Langton was addressed by Madame de Villarceau, and before he had quite done his duty in reply to her observations, Lady Carew whispered to Miss Desborough, "that she intended that gentleman to be her *own* squire of the body, in order to give him the earliest opportunity of convincing her (as he had threatened) of his right to interfere with her plans and projects."

He was, accordingly, no sooner released by Madame de Villarceau, than he was invited by Lady Carew, in a playful, but yet decided manner, "to

come and plead his excuse, as he best could, for plotting, as he had done, against her pleasure and gratification."

He expressed his readiness, and was beginning to give a half joking account of his objections to a long sojourn in Paris for young ladies, when Lady Carew coolly bid him wait till they had been over the apartments, after which, she should be glad to hear all he had to say for himself. He therefore alternately addressed his conversation (chiefly consisting of remarks on the different apartments as they viewed them) to one or other of the ladies; but any exchange of speech between him and Katherine, on more interesting subjects, was effectually barred during the whole time employed in going over the palace itself.

This business successfully accomplished, the whole party issued forth to see the grounds, when each lady was consigned to some especial guide and protector, a process through which (as Langton was "retained" by Lady Carew) Miss Desborough was likely to find herself, whether she would or no, linked to Robert Hazlewood. But he, albeit on the watch, was hampered at the critical moment, by the necessity of looking for a bracelet, which his cousin, Miss Westmere, had let fall; and by the time it was recovered, his "dark-haired maid" had been handed over, not precisely to the "king of men," but to a very fiery-looking, fiercely-moustachioed gentleman, whose name was made up of so many consonants, with so few vowels to keep

them in countenance, that the English, at any rate, seldom attempted to pronounce it, and, like Lady Carew, generally designated him as "Madame de Rosmond's Pole." Robert Hazlewood had nothing for it, therefore, but to bestow his company upon Mary Westmere, with whom he walked forward, while Katherine followed more leisurely with the nameless hero, saying to herself, "that any how, she was glad it was not Robert."

But this state of comparative satisfaction was not destined to last, for she soon discovered that "Madame de Rosmond's Pole," who had both read, and heard, that English girls converse and behave with greater freedom than continental young ladies, had thence drawn the conclusion that his own manners could hardly be *too* free. It is possible that a better acquaintance with his companion's countenance might have shown him his mistake; but he had always thought there was something slightly disdainful in the features of "La belle blonde's" dark-haired friend, and he did not suspect her of actually resenting his impertinence till after she had at once put an end to it, and to their "tête-à-tête," by so slackening her pace as to attach herself to the last stragglers of the procession of sight-seers, Mr. de Villarceau and his friend Mr. de Listenai. They had no objection to receive an addition to their company, and so many pretty things were said on the subject by the *old* gentlemen, that the young one, provoked at seeing them accepted so much more

graciously than the kind of compliments he had himself bestowed, and gradually perceiving that he was "de trop," made his bow, and walked forward to join some party where he hoped to be better appreciated.

It presently appeared however, that the long tour through the park, upon which the leaders of the party were bent, was, even as is sometimes the case in more important expeditions, too much for the strength of the "rear-guard." Poor Mr. de Villarceau, a good deal overpowered by the heat, which, as the day wore on, and the breeze subsided, was becoming very oppressive, had already declared, more than once, "qu'il n'en pouvait plus;" and his friend was so evidently in the same condition, that the sight of a stone bench, imbedded in a massive growth of clipped yew, presented an irresistible temptation. Their only scruple was on account of Katherine; but upon her reiterated assurances "that she was as tired as themselves, and better pleased to rest in the shade than to go on to see any point of view whatever," they quieted their consciences and sat down, observing that the place of general "rendezvous" was not very distant, and that when the time approached, they should proceed thither at their leisure.

It was an unspeakable relief when that was settled—would have been greater if Messieurs de Villarceau and de Listenai had only done what Katherine was sure would have been best for them, namely, leaned back, each on his own corner

of the bench, and gone to sleep. But they did no such thing; on the contrary, they kept up a very lively conversation, in which she was expected to take her share. It was not a very easy matter; for, besides being, as she professed, "tired," her spirits had sunk a good deal since the morning, and she was heartily glad when, at length, a subject was started, which soon brought her two companions—French politeness notwithstanding—fairly to forget her presence.

This all-engrossing topic was the discrepancy between the text of Ségur's "Histoire de la Grande Armée," and the comments of General Gourgaud on the same. At another time, Katherine would have followed the discussion with interest; but, besides that the discourse of the old soldiers soon became very technical, the moment she was relieved from the necessity of giving rational answers to questions addressed to herself, the speculations of her own mind got the upperhand. Her thoughts absorbed her more and more, and she was wondering whether, after all, Oswald Langton would be allowed opportunity for any of those "explanations," which, to judge by his manner, he was still eager to begin, when the name of Carew, uttered, as it seemed, close behind her, and followed by other words in her own language, struck her ear, and her meditations were interrupted by a feeling of startled surprise. She recollected the probability of there being a corresponding bench on the other side of the clipped yew hedge, time

enough to understand that this was not precisely an instance of "airy tongues that syllable men's names." She fancied even that she had recognised the somewhat peculiar tones of Mr. Thornhill, the usually silent traveller, whom she had occasionally heard delivering concise answers to merciless cross-questionings at her host's table, and of whom she had had a glimpse while going over the palace apartments an hour or two back. She ceased to have any doubt, when—in answer, apparently, to a sentence of which the sound only reached her—she heard him pronounce these words:

"My opinion of Lady Carew was made up from the day I saw she had entered into a league, offensive and defensive, with that good-for-nothing baggage, Mrs. Blackwood—I beg her pardon—Countess Korinski."

There it was—the Countess Korinski again! What would the silent man say next? The remarks of the other unseen speaker, whose voice was utterly unknown to Katherine, did not reach her so plainly; and though she strained her ear with painful attention, she caught nothing distinctly till Mr. Thornhill's answer came:

"It's when old Carew has been off to the play with that girl they have with them."

The rejoinder was as unintelligible to Katherine as the previous one, in consequence of a loud assertion made by one of those between whom she sat. But, as the Frenchman's tones somewhat lowered, she heard Thornhill begin again:

"What has brought me to notice that, and other things, has been my having so often had to climb up five flights of stairs above *them*, to look after my clever little friend in the garret there, who is perfecting (under my superintendence) that botanical microscope I was telling you of; and, since the evenings have been so light, I have seen what satisfies me that 'Milédi' . . ."

What he farther added was inaudible to Katherine, owing to a slight rustling in the yew hedge, caused, apparently, by the moving of a bird. The first thing she next heard was the other voice, asking Thornhill "if he did not think it was Neyrac?"

"No, no. She makes a fool of Neyrac, Frenchman though he be—uses him for a blind. Langton's the fellow that slips in when the coast is clear!"

Katherine's head swam round, as she heard this assertion; and had Messieurs de Villarceau and de Listenai been one whit less absorbed in the "pro's and con's" of Gourgaud *versus* Ségur, they must have noticed the deadly paleness which overspread her face. But the old officers heeded not the change in their young companion's countenance; while she, well-nigh paralysed with horror and disgust, temporarily lost the capacity of attention, and grew, for some moments, equally deaf to what was passing behind and beside her. She forced herself, however, to overcome the stunned sensation which blunted all her powers. Having

heard so much, she would—cost what it might—hear what else there might be to hear. She therefore, in a kind of desperation, bent her every faculty to catch her countrymen's dialogue as it proceeded, and presently heard Thornhill's companion observe, "that he had thought Neyrac the happy man."

"So do many," returned Thornhill; "and, as to old Carew," continued he, with a sort of chuckle, "I have heard him ask Langton why he didn't come oftener, to push his fortune with that Miss—what's her name? (with the fine eyes, you know) who, he says, has money."

Katherine again lost some words, though listening with painful—with breathless effort; she soon however perceived that Thornhill was speaking anew.

"These reasons convinced me," he said, "and though I don't tell you I ever met him face to face on the stairs, you surely remember his hurrying out of their door just as the clock struck ten, the night after *her* party, when you and I were taking a stroll along the Rue Castiglione, instead of going, as we ought, to Mrs. Charlemont's?"

"We didn't see his face, and *I* thought it had been Neyrac," was the reply.

"One can't swear to a man who just brushes by in that sort of light," returned Thornhill; "but it was broad day the forenoon after, when I saw *her* come into the Tuileries, with that convenient person the Countess Korinski and young Birkenstein, who

discreetly made themselves scarce the moment they had consigned the lady to the care of our friend Langton."

"It's clear *some* one comforts her lonely evenings," observed Thornhill's friend.

"And not her evenings only," said the traveller, "if my queer little dog of an instrument-maker in the 'cinquième' is to be relied on; for one day when I asked if there was anyone on the stairs below, he said, with an inimitable shrug, 'that it was only the gentleman who usually visited Madame on the first floor, while Mademoiselle was taking her singing lessons. Of course I give you *that* for what it's worth; but whatever may be Neyrac's chances hereafter, I would take heavy odds for Langton now; though I shan't convince *you*, I see—not to-day at least; so, as time's precious, and our dinner hour at Bellevue an early one, I think we should be moving."

The voices of the unseen speakers were not heard again; Katherine's visible neighbours talked on as before; and she remained as free as if she had been in a cell or a desert, to think over what she had learnt. It seemed as though a mist had been suddenly swept from her eyes; events that had excited no suspicion of evil as they occurred, now bore another face; and facts, to the truth of which she could herself bear witness, fitted too closely to the rest for a shadow of disbelief to remain. She recollected Lady Carew's walk with the countess

the morning after Mrs. Charlemont's party, and recalled—oh, how distinctly! the account she had given *her* "of her quiet talk alone with Emily." She recollected too—but there was no end to the hateful recollections that crowded on her dizzy brain. The mystery of iniquity lay unveiled before her—jealousy was at the root of her hostess' strange demeanour since Baron R——'s fête.

"As to Langton," said she to herself, smiling in scorn at the shallow observers who doubted between him and Neyrac, "it was too revolting to seek to investigate *his* aims, and examine the crooked paths in which *he* trod." In one point, and in one sense, he had, for whatever end, spoken truth; the Carews' house was no fit abode for her, and she would leave it without scruple or delay. Well for her that she could so leave it! and she thanked Heaven that the Hazlewoods were still in France—were present at this very social meeting. She would lose no time in making known her change of plans to them. There could be no doubt as to her line of conduct—as to her duty; and even as she came to this resolution she perceived, that her companions—whichever way they had settled the question they had been discussing—were considering the fitness of betaking themselves "quietly" to the "trysting place," whence all were to proceed in a body to the Westmeres'.

They started accordingly; Katherine making use of the interval of time afforded by the walk,

to compose her countenance, prepare her speeches, and repress, so far as she was able, all outward tokens of the shock from which every fibre of her frame still trembled. She had never certainly stood in greater need of a "volto sciolto" to cover the thoughts of her heart, than when, on finally joining the party awaiting her and her elderly esquires, she found herself face to face with Langton and Lady Carew, who walked up together leisurely from behind the others, the latter inquiring gaily of her, "how she had managed to get rid of the gentleman who had appeared so enchanted to be established as her humble servant?"

She knew not what she replied; but it was something which answered the present purpose, for Lady Carew smiled, called her a clever girl, and passed on, while Katherine attached herself resolutely to the Hazlewood party, anxious to seize the very first opportunity of obtaining permission to travel home with them.

Mrs. Hazlewood took her "under her wing" with great satisfaction, and many words were not needed to make her understand that her young friend had changed her mind, and would be now glad to hasten her return to England. Mrs. Hazlewood was "only sorry," she said, "that, owing to some unforeseen circumstances, they were obliged to start on Monday instead of Wednesday, which change she feared would allow her dear Kate but little time for preparations."

Katherine thought how gladly she would have

started that night; how gladly said, "Mrs. Hazlewood, will you take me away with you this moment?" but she could only reply "that Monday would be perfectly convenient," and consider within herself, that she was fortunate in being able to look forward to so speedy an escape.

The next thing to be done was to inform Lady Mary Shelburne, with fitting thanks and due politeness, of her altered plans; and this duty she fulfilled during the taking off of bonnets and scarfs, smoothing of locks, etc., that took place immediately upon their arrival at the Westmeres'.

The business was not accomplished without some trial to her command of countenance; for, though Lady Mary's expressions of regret, "on her *own* account," were both kind and warm, she added a sentence, in commendation of the "good sense Miss Desborough shewed, in feeling that it was not *always* desirable to be too long away from one's family," which let her plainly see that the disposition attributed to her by Lady Carew was by no means imaginary. Luckily, Lady Mary's words (though they appeared pointed enough to one so tremblingly alive to their import) required no reply, more especially as the whole party was now hurrying to the drawing-room. There, in expectation of the announcement of dinner, Katherine found all those congregated whom it most sickened her to look at. Sir Edward, with his friend and fellow-epicure, Mr. Seebright, just come down from Paris; Langton, standing near

Lady Carew, who was engaged in a very animated conversation with Mr. de Neyrac; and, at the farther end of the apartment, half in the room and half in the beautiful creeper-clothed verandah, Mr. Thornhill, and a little man, with rather inquisitive eyes, who, as she instantly felt, *must* have been his companion behind the clipt yew. A fresh shudder came over her, as she reflected that they were, probably, even now carrying on their speculations, and that their return to Paris, that evening, would, undoubtedly, be enlivened by a renewed debate on the question of "Langton *versus* Neyrac!"

She was just admitting to herself that the false impression (if once taken up) might, not unnaturally, be in process of confirmation at that very moment, when the butler's making known that the crowning event of the day—the dinner, namely—was "ready," caused a general rising of the company. In the course of the moving hither and thither that followed, she thought Langton was manœuvering for the purpose of being her neighbour at table; but she was spared the trouble of thwarting his endeavours, by perceiving that Lady Carew found time to whisper, rather significantly, to Madame de Villarceau, which whisper was followed by that lady's taking possession of him, in a manner he could scarcely avoid. The whole resulted in his being so placed at table as to be, not near, but opposite to Katherine, who, finally, found herself seated between Robert

Hazlewood and "John Shelburne's Italian Marchese." What they talked of to her, what she said to them, she could no more have told, afterwards, than she could have given an account of Messieurs de Villarceau and de Listenai's military discussion on the stone bench in the park. She managed, at least, so far to cover her complete absence of mind as to escape remark; and in the meantime was chiefly intent on not seeing—or not seeming to see—the looks of anxious curiosity, which she *felt* to be fastened on her by Langton, every moment that he was not absolutely engaged by Madame de Villarceau's claims on his attention. What did it now matter to her whether he loved her—as she had been persuaded the day before—or whether he had sought to interest her, from motives either of vanity or mercenary calculation? She saw in him the perverter of one, who, let her faults be what they might, had been her early friend, the companion of her happiest hours. That friendship, that happiness, was at an end, through him. If he *did* love her, she owed him no gratitude for a heart so lately devoted to a lawless passion; and, if he did not, she was too glad to have the power of shewing him, that she was not to be deceived and fooled by his feigned appreciation of her character, and admiration of her person.

All this was still full in her mind—little else, in fact, had employed it—when the whole party rose from table; and though some lingered to take

coffee in the garden on which the dining-room looked, the greater number (among whom was Lady Carew) hastened to return to Paris while it was still daylight. Langton snatched this moment to draw near Katherine; it was impossible, without *publicly* offending him, to reject the arm he offered in order to conduct her towards her hostess' vehicle; and while the delays of the party before forced them to wait a while on the steps, he said, in a low voice:

"This has been a most provoking—most disappointing day; do what I would, all has gone cross—for *me*, at least; but you and Lady Carew will surely be at the Villarceaus' on Monday?"

"No, Mr. Langton," returned she, in a tone she meant to be unconcerned, "you will not see *me* there; for—I will not say I have taken your advice—but—I am going to act in accordance with it. I have considered that I have been indeed too long away from my family, and it is settled that I go home to England, with Mrs. Hazlewood, on Monday morning."

"Monday morning!" repeated he; "you have taken my advice, with a vengeance! I am punished, if ever man was, for giving it sincerely; and without telling me why you have so suddenly altered your views!"

"I have told you my reasons," replied she, coldly.

"Yes, but they existed equally yesterday; and—to-morrow's Sunday—I know I can't go near you

so as to speak as I wish to speak; but, if you get safe to England, and don't marry Robert Hazlewood on arriving, why, *I* too may get safe there some day, and once on our own soil we may understand each other yet."

"I should be sorry your plans were changed on my account," murmured she.

"If I go to England, Miss Desborough, it will be on my own account, and for the satisfaction of my own mind."

"If so," she began . . . .

"If so," repeated he, "there can be no objection, according to any code, I presume; I can't tell about day or week—more's the pity; but, unless I am shot or drowned in the interim, you have not done with me."

"Come along, Kate," cried Lady Carew, who was already in the carriage.

Langton led her hastily to the steps of the vehicle, shook hands with her and Lady Carew when they were seated, and turned away instantly; while Neyrac remained to exchange a few last words, and then stood bowing and gazing till they were out of sight.

Katherine had had no leisure to consider with herself how and when to announce to her hostess her resolution of departing within two days; but, instantly deciding that the first moment of being alone with her would be the best, she forced herself to say, though with a tremulous voice:

"Isabella, I have reflected since yesterday that,

although I have leave to stay here, yet I ought not to be so long from home; and I have arranged with Mrs. Hazlewood to take me with her on Monday morning."

Lady Carew grew pale as she exclaimed:

"Is it possible I have heard you aright? After all your promises, can it be that you mean—that you wish—to leave me?"

"Yes," replied Katherine, "you have been very kind to me; I am sorely grieved to appear ungracious; but I do wish to return home immediately, and am only sorry not to have seen things in the same light when I made a different decision."

"This is Langton's doing!" cried Lady Carew, unable to restrain herself.

"No," said Katherine, "I have not changed my mind in consequence of anything he has said to me."

"No! then in consequence of what?"

Katherine trembled from head to foot at this question, which she scarcely knew how to evade; yet, after a pause, she answered:

"It is partly owing to what I have just said, and partly because I should find a certain difficulty in managing, just now, so as neither to quarrel with Mr. Langton, nor yet to appear to encourage his fancies for giving advice and bestowing lectures. It is better I should go."

"If it is so," said Lady Carew, over whose countenance a variety of quickly-changing ex-

pressions passed during Katherine's speech, "if it is so, you are perhaps right, and I must learn to do without you."

She then sank into a state of gloomy silence, from which she did not rouse herself till the carriage was almost at her door, when she said, in a marked tone:

"If you connected yourself with him, he would be your bane; he has been that of whoever has been fool enough to trust him."

A mixture of astonishment and terror rendered Katherine speechless; but, after a time, she strung up her courage to say, without looking at Lady Carew:

"I believe you are right; and I have certainly no wish to see him again, either here or elsewhere."

The carriage was by this time under the "Porte Cochère;" Lady Carew made no rejoinder; and, before they had been five minutes in the drawing-room, Sir Edward, Mr. Seebright, and the lights, which the approach of dusk was rendering necessary, all came in together.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AMID the chaotic medley of odious considerations, which did not work the less painfully within Katherine's mind for lying under the veil of "behaving as usual" before Sir Edward, the necessity of writing home assumed an importance, which grew into almost feverish hurry; and her first action, on being left alone in her room, was to snatch up a pen, and trace a few hasty lines to her mother, briefly announcing the change of plan, "for which," she added, "she would give no reason *then*, as she would explain all when they met." She folded her short letter, directed it, threw it down on the table, saying, "That's done, at any rate!" and then lying back in her chair, felt thankful for her present release from that bondage of compulsory dissimulation which had wellnigh stifled her. The longing of the Psalmist to have "wings like a dove," came over her. "If she could only wake at Wyngate in her bed with the white curtains, instead of that damask-hung couch with its brilliant mirror!" But with the thoughts of "waking at Wyngate," a whole host of disagreeables—obscured from her view while employed,

first in providing for her own escape, and then in maintaining the appearance of outward indifference —rose in endless array before her. She was, she considered, bound in honour to keep religiously from the world that secret she could never have discovered, save by and through the hospitality of her, who, whatever she had now become, under the influence of a systematically profligate man, had once been her dearest friend. Of her own power to keep this secret she was certain—but her mother! She would feel with her, she knew; would faithfully promise, and fully intend, neither to say nor to do aught that should excite suspicion; and yet—and yet—all experience had shown that thorough discretion was not to be expected from her. It was probable—more than probable—that the very next time Cecilia was at Mrs. Tynedale's, and came over unsuspiciously to Wyngate, to talk and be talked to as usual, some chance allusion to "Kate's Paris visit" would bring out things calculated to destroy the peace of Cecilia's whole existence! Nor was this all; Cecilia's grief would be buried in her own breast; but Mrs. Hazlewood's Paris observations, though directed (as Katherine fancied) rather to Neyrac than Langton, would doubtless find their vent in "fishing remarks," which, if not met by perfect discretion or *perfect ignorance*, would lead to that lady's being put in possession of such facts as must utterly blast Lady Carew's reputation. In what would all this black labyrinth end? "No," thought Katherine, "it

will not do to 'explain everything when we meet.' I must consider at once what to say, and what to leave unsaid, if I would avoid doing certain mischief for no better object than the relief of my own mind." She took a fresh sheet of paper, and set down a few sentences, with the look of which she was very little satisfied; but she tried again, and after repeated attempts, succeeded in framing an epistle (considerably more lengthy than the original one), in which she stated, first, her conviction, on second thoughts, "that she had been too long away from home to wait for Lady Mary Shelburne's somewhat indefinite time for returning," and then "that in spite of Isabella's kind wishes to retain her, she had discovered, *after* presenting her request for permission to stay on, that Sir Edward had a project of visiting the Scudamores in Switzerland, which she did not at all like to interfere with." These reasons, therefore, combined with her meeting the Hazlewoods that day, and finding that they were still able and willing to take charge of her, had resulted in the sudden change of plans, which she was vain enough to believe would not create an unpleasant surprise at Wyngate. "That will do," thought she, as she carefully destroyed her first letter, and the two or three sheets on which her failures had been penned.

Nothing more was now left to be done; no curious eye was there to see her demeanour, or draw conclusions from it; all restraining force was withdrawn, and Katherine now yielded herself up,

not to sleep or to fatigue (she felt as incapable of the one as she was insensible of the other), but to the overpowering rush of every sorrowful and bitterly painful emotion. She bewailed the utter degradation, the guilt, the shame, and the falsehood of the being who had, a second time, become the object of her adoration. That this sore evil, too, this foul disgrace, should be the work of Cecilia's brother! And she had been beginning to think well of that man! This recollection transported her beyond all bounds of patience. What would be Isabella's career? What would be Isabella's fate? Would it—might it—avail aught, if, casting away all fear of misinterpretation, she dared to exhort her to change of life and repentance? No, for in her present mood she would assuredly deny whatever could not be proved against her. It might please Heaven to bring her one day, through sorrow, to that penitence which involves the admission of sin; but now, as at this time, and *from her*, no warning words would be heeded. "Her marriage lowered her," said Katherine to herself, as she turned from side to side in the bed she had never before found uneasy, and thought restlessly of the old smart of her first disenchantment, "but she meant to do her duty, and would have always done it, I believe, if she had not come across *that* man, whose hypocrisy wears such an air of frankness!"

CHAPTER XXV.

WE left Kate Desborough, restless in body and perturbed in soul, seeking in vain for repose under the azure canopy of her Parisian bed, in the "blue chamber," at the Carews'; but after an interval of seven days, we find her again in another scene; for we behold her seated on the smooth green moss, at the foot of one of those very trees, for whose still shade she had sometimes longed in the "Rue Castiglione." The thick foliage of one of the more wooded spots in Wyngate Park sheltered her and her sister Annie from the heat; but no gloomy forest, no dim wilderness of entangled branches divided them from the light and life beyond the bower that arched above their heads. The eye was free to travel, from shade into sunshine, over the fair expanse of landscape, presenting as varied a view of hill and dale, of neighbouring meadows and distant spires, as can glad the sight of mortal on a summer afternoon.

Katherine was leaning back, lazily, against the trunk of an elm; and, as she cast a quietly-amused look on her young sister, whose fingers

were as busy weaving rushes as her lips were in chattering, she might have sat for the picture of calm enjoyment and pleased attention.

"Now, what do you think the Selwyns said when they were last here, Kate?" asked the little girl.

"I am sure I don't know, Annie!" was the reply.

"And I am sure she doesn't care!" added Mr. Oakly, who, loaded with fishing tackle, and followed at a little distance by his cousin, Lewis Markham, appeared at this moment behind his daughter. "How can you fancy, Annie, that Kate will trouble her head what stuff they talked! But you are always full of some long story you have picked up, no one knows how or where, and that you expect folks to listen to!"

"Yes, papa; and I do get listened to, I assure you," said Annie, with an almost imperceptible motion of her head, which did *not* give token of submissiveness. "Of course I don't expect you or cousin Lewis to listen to my nonsense; but Kate does!"

"Then she must be very good-natured or very silly, that's all."

"Kate's not silly," cried Annie, vehemently.

"Well, she's extremely good-natured, as I said before."

"No, it's not that, either," began his daughter; but she was interrupted by Lewis Markham's observing, with feigned gravity, "that he was very sorry she found her sister so ill-natured."

"Now, as if I possibly could mean that! You know I didn't! I just wanted papa to understand that it was not *only* out of good nature she sat listening. For, do you know," added she, looking up, rather saucily, to Mr. Oakly; "do you know, I think if poor Kate had no more home news told her than just what you and mamma have supplied her with, she wouldn't have the least idea of anything that has been done or said here since she went to Paris?"

"That would be a sad loss," observed her father, laughing. "But she will have time enough to gather as much as she will want of such sort of information, without your taking all the words out of her mouth, now she is full of her Paris doings and Paris friends, which she would be glad to talk of, now and then, if you only let her, for I have a notion *they* interest her rather more than anything about the Selwyns!"

He flipped her chin rather contemptuously as he spoke; but she proceeded to state that it was nothing about the Selwyns themselves, only something—"something," continued she, with a pert nod, "which shews they know as little as papa does about Kate, and what Kate cares for! Just fancy Georgiana's telling me my sister would be sure to hate everything here at home, or anywhere in England, now she had had a taste of the Continent, and that I must not expect her to put up with any of my ways again! I made her no answer, because I know she thinks me a mere chit,

and would not have minded anything I said; but I thought my own thoughts, and I was right; for here *is* Kate, as glad and happy as possible to be back, and putting up with me the same as ever!"

"Well, if you are right as to the first part of the story, Annie," said Mr. Oakly, looking at Kate as he moved a step in the direction of the house, "I am rejoiced it should be so, for I confess I had my fears. You and I, Lewis," continued he, addressing his cousin, "you and I had agreed together that Wyngate must seem wofully flat after Paris;" and without waiting for an answer, Mr. Oakly walked away, while his kinsman found himself a comfortable seat on the turf near the two sisters.

"It is very odd," began Katherine, with a somewhat heightened color, as soon as her step-father was gone, "very odd, and not very flattering, to discover that everyone should have reckoned on my behaving much as children do the day after a party of pleasure, when they are cross and unmanageable, as a matter of course!"

"You are very indignant," said Markham.

"Well, don't you think I have cause?" asked Katherine, now smiling at her own vehemence, yet by no means disposed to give up her grievance.

"Why, it might be held injurious to a stoic philosopher, to suspect *him* of feeling flat on exchanging the excitement of a pleasure tour for his ordinary course of household existence; but—but—I didn't know . . . "

"That I had set up for a philosopher?" interrupted Kate. "No more I have! but still . . "

"You think it hard," resumed he, "to be looked on as something like the rest of us poor mortals?"

"You don't surely believe, Mr. Markham, that *everyone* is so childish as I am evidently supposed to be?"

"Everyone! I don't know; there *may* be individuals above or below the risk of being a little taken off their feet by unaccustomed enjoyment of whatever kind, or of feeling rather dull when turned back into their proper places of every-day work and duty. But *I* don't belong to the class; for *I* am apt to be a good deal too much pleased with an agreeable visit, or an adventurous excursion, not to feel it rather a dreary business, at first, to sit down again to my daily routine, whether here at my uncle's or in India; so I am afraid I can't sympathize with your sense of injury as much as I ought. To speak truth, indeed, I looked on it as but natural that you should, after the first pleasure of meeting your home friends, and telling them your best stories, be, for a while, a little less interested in things as they are here than I have known you before."

"I am sure, Mr. Markham, I was not much interested in anything when you were last here!" said Katherine.

"Not in gardening, or school teaching, or the beauties of nature," replied he, "you had no taste

in any of those lines, I am aware; and I recollect your telling me how weary you were of trees, and plants, and views, however beautiful—including too, most descriptions of the same—unless all those things were given an interest by the presence of human beings who could employ your fancy. I recollect all that; but still you were interested, and very much interested, by some things within doors; by the school-room (or the library, I believe you call it now) and its contents; I have known you talk by the hour of your pet books—ay, and fight by the hour for them!"

"Yes, I know," said she, with a sparkle in her eyes, indicating perfect readiness to do battle anew for the first favorite that should be called in question. "But then that wasn't exactly—at least I wasn't then—" She stopped; yet after a moment's hesitation as to how to express her meaning, she went on gaily, "You know, Mr. Markham, one can't discuss books and characters except with people who have read, and cared for what they read. Now the books are not Wyngate. I might read them anywhere; and I was not, I am sure, the least interested or pleased when you were last here, by the general aspect of things around me, by the place, or by the people."

"And are you now?"

"Yes, I am; that is, I don't know that I shall like doing what are called 'my duties' any better than I did; but—I hardly know how to describe it—these trees and that field were always the same as

they are, I suppose, but I never before felt so happy to sit down under the elms, to look out towards Spelding! I have been away from home before now—at my uncle Herbert's too—but I never was so glad to see them all again as I have been this time. To be sure," added she, with a more sober look and tone, "I was never away anything like so long; and that makes a difference, I dare-say."

"Perhaps," observed Markham. "But at all events, I suppose I am to beg pardon for agreeing with Oakly, that you might find us all very dull down here. I am heartily glad you don't; only, if you will not be angry with the question, do tell me, Miss Desborough, is it that you were disappointed with Paris?"

"No, I was not; I was more pleased with some things—found others more agreeable—than I had expected; and yet it is possible, it is true, whether folks will believe me or no, that I am very glad, most happy to be home again!"

"There, I said so!" cried Annie, triumphantly. "Don't you believe her, cousin Lewis?"

"I always believed your sister," answered he, "believe her as much now as ever."

"But you didn't believe *me*," insisted the young lady, in a tone of rebuke.

"That was very wicked," remarked Katherine, playfully, "a far higher crime and misdemeanour than you could ever be guilty of towards *me;* for *I* don't expect people to believe me always—I dare-

say they can't. But Annie does expect most implicit belief on all occasions."

"To be sure; why shouldn't I?" cried she.

"I will do my very best to give it," returned Markham.

"You are laughing at me, cousin Lewis," exclaimed Annie, "and I won't speak a word more."

"I'm afraid you will punish yourself," observed her sister.

"I mean I shan't speak to *him;* I'll talk to you as much as you like."

"And I may listen, may not I?" asked Markham, submissively.

"I don't care whether you do or not," returned she. "I thought you didn't like my nonsense; but I don't mind, and I shall just go on telling Kate everything, as if you were not by."

"That's exactly what I should like," said Lewis Markham, looking down demurely, as if bowing resignedly to the sentence; while the young lady could hardly make up her mind whether to take all as a joke, or to quarrel in good earnest.

"Come, Annie," said Kate, who was at bottom not sorry that her sister's willingness to run on about anything and everything, should hinder others from noticing the extreme sobriety with which she herself related the events of her stay abroad, "come, Annie, we have proved the Selwyns were mistaken, and other people too—have you no more news for me?"

"Why, no, I am afraid not; for of course

mamma wrote to you about the Moat's being inhabited again."

"Indeed she did not."

"And you have been here two whole days in the house, and mamma has never told you?"

"I have, as you see. But you have excited my curiosity considerably; is there anything wonderful about these new inhabitants of that out-of-the-way place? Are they people I ever knew or heard of?"

"Not people you ever knew, but people you have heard of often enough. What do you think of Cecilia's brother Spencer being there, the one that married, you know, and is so miserably poor. Well, he has been put there by Lord Harworth, and is to see after all the property about there, which people seem to think is a very good thing for him—for Spencer Langton, I mean—and as he is a friend, and not only a man of business, Lord Harworth gives him the Moat to live in for as long as he manages the estates, and they have been there for these three weeks now. Won't it be nice for them to have Cecilia staying with them—I mean won't it be nice for us when they do?"

"Very nice," answered Katherine, after a slight pause; "but is she likely to stay at the Moat?"

"Oh, I don't know; but when mamma called there, I went with her, and I'm sure either Mr. or Mrs. Langton said they expected Cecilia soon, on her way to somewhere else, I believe; why shouldn't she pay them a visit?"

"Oh, for no reason, when I think of it; for I

don't think old Mr. Langton actually quarrelled with his son, though he disapproved so much of his marriage. It comes back to me now that I heard Oswald Langton—the eldest of them, you know—tell some one in Paris that his brother was going to manage some nobleman's affairs; but I did not catch the name, and I don't think anything was said about the Moat."

"*He* is not very likely to visit the Moat," observed Markham; "for I have heard him declare that nothing would ever induce him again to spend a day under Spencer's roof, to see, with his own eyes, how uncomfortable and discontented two people could make each other, who had married 'all for love' and 'the world well lost.'"

"Are the Spencer Langtons so discontented, then?" asked Katherine.

"Why, I hope they may be less so since they have had a comfortable mansion over their heads in your neighbourhood, and an addition to their income besides; but I am afraid it was a true bill till lately, and no great wonder, considering; for *he* had always lived up to whatever he had, and she had nothing to add to it but her own frivolity and childish helplessness. I was sorry for Spencer, for he is a good fellow, and I trust matters will mend with him now; albeit that marriage *was* as foolish a thing as ever was done."

"What made him marry her if she is such a goose?" inquired Annie, entirely forgetting her resolution "not to speak to cousin Lewis."

"Why, it was his fate, I suppose," answered Markham. "And then she is—or was—pretty, so far as that goes."

"You are very philosophical to-day, Mr. Markham," said Katherine. "But did you think her very pretty, Annie?"

"Yes, pretty. I don't know about *very*, but pretty, certainly; and whether she is discontented or not, she was excessively good-natured to *us;* and she wanted to have me to stay with her, she says it's so dull all by herself, with Mr. Langton out the whole day! I daresay mamma would have let me, too, only as Miss Freeman was just come back from her holiday, some excuse was made about my studies not being to be interrupted; but I think she has set her heart on getting one of us, and I shouldn't wonder if you were to be asked to the Moat the moment she knows you are here."

"I am sure I don't want to go there," said Miss Desborough, rather shortly. "I mean," added she, as if correcting herself, "that having only just come home, I don't want to be going anywhere else for one while."

"No, I daresay not," said Annie, "and *I* don't want you to go, either! But I hardly think you will be let alone; for Mrs. Spencer Langton has heard of you, and wishes to know you; and I see she is a person who will tease and tease till she gets a thing, so you must not be surprised if you have to pay a visit there before long, whether you like it or no! Not that I should expect it to be

unpleasant at all; I only wish they would have let me go! But since that is not to be, I should rather like to hear from you, *presently*, whether their 'Love in a Cottage' plans have really turned out so very badly."

"If they have," returned Katherine, "I should most particularly hate to make a third with such a couple!"

"You think yourself better off here, with your old friends, the books, do you not?" asked Lewis Markham.

"Indeed I do! Not that I have opened one since I have been back; but I shall set to work on Monday, particularly if . . . Do you remember, Mr. Markham, a grand battle we once had about Madame de Stael—about something in her 'Allemagne?' No—it's not likely you should."

"Yes, perfectly; that is, I recollect the battle, and—I think—its subject; only I can't remember which side I took in the discussion—as I suspect I have on different occasions fought on both."

"Fought on both!—what a horrid insincere or indifferent creature you must be!" cried Annie; while her sister only *looked* her contempt of such lukewarmness.

"Not insincere, not indifferent," replied he, "only a good bit older than either of you, young ladies; and the truth is, that in all those questions about the good or evil influence of literature, the cultivation of the arts, and the feeding or starving of the imagination, there is so much to be said on

both sides of the question, and one is so differently swayed in one's opinions on such points, according to one's mood at the moment, and according to the kind of people with whom one is conversing, that it is quite possible to take, at different times, different sides of such an argument, without being either insincere or uninterested."

"I can't understand that," said Annie, disdainfully.

"It may be," observed her sister, with a look of reflection, "that I attach more importance to the kind of thing than it deserves; but I *do* like people to care enough for what they talk of to be in earnest about it!"

"So do I," said Markham, "like it very much; am never so wearied as by those who keep up a perpetual skimming on the surface of what they will never dip deep into."

"But even that," proceeded Miss Desborough, involuntarily reminded of something which awakened a new train of thought; "even that is better than the actual counterfeiting of feelings and views, that have no real influence over the mind and conduct of the person professing them."

"Are you thinking of any particular person?" asked Markham.

"Well, I suppose I was," answered Katherine, colouring highly, as she forced herself to give a true reply; "but I had rather not think of anything so provoking. I should like better to fight any battle with a combatant whom I can trust for

saying nothing but what he does really think at the time."

"That sounds like a challenge! and it is only a pity there is nothing for us to fight about just now; for I have expressed my full belief in your unalloyed pleasure at returning home; I sympathize entirely in your wish, that you may not be carried off to the Moat before you have shown us all your Paris bonnets here; and as to most matters of politics, taste, education, dress, metaphysics, or any other great social questions, I have got so out of the practice of considering their bearings since I last had Oswald Langton to discuss them with, that I may fairly declare myself too stupid to be a worthy antagonist."

"Oh, I wont fight with a stupid enemy!" cried Katherine, gaily, albeit disagreeably surprised by the unexpected allusion to Oswald Langton; "you must really brighten up, or where would be the use of you? But we shall see on Monday, whether you will be as submissive or as lazy as you are now."

"I *have* been very lazy since I have been at Wyngate this time; but," continued he, "I have always forgotten to ask if you saw anything, saw much, of Oswald Langton while you were at the Carews'?"

"I saw a good deal of him latterly," she replied; and then (for she preferred putting questions on this subject to answering them herself) she inquired of Markham, "whether *he* were very intimate with Oswald Langton?"

"Our families were intimate before we were

born; and previously to my going to India, I saw as much of him, knew as much of him, as you are apt to do of any one you are not at school or college with. Since then, we have been a good deal out of each other's way; but when we have met it has been on the old footing; and as he was at Shadworth when I arrived at my uncle's from India last summer, I saw him almost every day till he went to Paris. I found him as friendly as ever; I don't know a man whose company I like better; for he is just one of those people with whom it is a real pleasure to talk and argue about all things under the sun, both because he is *not* one of those who never choose to go below the surface, and because, among those who will, it is not every one who shows, at bottom, so much heart and such honourable feeling."

Kate made no reply. She did not trust herself to take up *this* handle for a "discussion on character;" and Markham's belief in Langton's "heart" and "honourable feeling" somewhat detracted from her opinion of his penetration. He, however, took no notice of her silence, and went on to say "that, in an idle man, as Langton unluckily was, it was always remarkable when the whole mind and character were not frittered away; that had always been his fear for him, and it was a thousand pities he was in no profession, though the thing was—he believed—rather his misfortune than his fault; now his brothers, Spencer and Henry . . . ."

"I am afraid," interrupted Katherine, "that

Miss Freeman will not trust Annie with me again, if we stay here much longer; so, as that rush basket is finished," continued she, rising from her mossy seat as she spoke, "I believe we ought to begin moving homewards."

No opposition was made by either of her companions, and the three, accordingly, began to walk leisurely in the direction of the house; while Miss Desborough, resolving if she could possibly avoid it, not to be entangled in any farther discussion of Oswald Langton's merits and demerits, asked Markham questions about India, and his own adventures there, which were likely to prevent his recurring to the former subject.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DURING the one day of constrained misery that had intervened from Miss Desborough's forming the plan of returning home to her putting it into execution, no event had occurred causing any break up of the system of reserve tacitly established between her and her hostess. Lady Carew was easy and familiar in manner, and, as usual, very kind in little things. She told her, as carelessly as if nothing connected with the subject had ever ruffled or annoyed her, how she had "made Sir Edward thoroughly understand her reasons for leaving them," appeared herself to take her doing so entirely as a matter of course, and—outwardly, at any rate—kept up a fair show of life and spirits. The hurry of business helped her guest to do likewise. But her self-possession gave way at the moment of leave-taking, when a thousand mingled feelings seemed ready to burst the bosom which Isabella strained to hers in emotion as strong as evidently real, yet without uttering a word which could be dwelt on with comfort by Katherine, who felt, as she drove, weeping, from the door, that, albeit the outward forms of

intimacy must needs be kept up—*as friends* they were for ever divided.

To rouse herself, and endeavour to respond cheerfully to the Hazlewood's greetings and self-congratulations on the beauty of the morning, was a necessity; but the composure she had partially regained was very nearly overset, when, as they passed the "Barrière," her eyes met those of Oswald Langton, bowing as they drove by. Was that chance a chance indeed? Or had he gone forth, at that early hour, to such a distance from his own abode, with the direct object of putting himself in her way? She could not determine; but a shudder came over her as she recollected that, only two days back, such a mark of interest would have pleased and flattered her from that very man whom she now suspected, perhaps of a desire to deceive her—and through her, the world and Sir Edward—by a false show of preference—perhaps of a view, such as Lady Carew had hinted at, of obtaining her in marriage for the sake of her fortune. She felt humiliated by the notion of having been the object of either plan, and promised herself, should Langton ever think it worth while to prosecute his endeavours, to teach him that he was dealing with one who saw through his art, and despised his machinations. "Was he, however, as regarded *her*, so thoroughly artful?" A voice within her occasionally whispered this doubt, which rested chiefly on her remembrance of the evident and real jealousy shown her by Lady

Carew, who might, nevertheless, be very groundlessly alarmed for the possession of a heart which was still hers, in spite of appearances put on for prudential aims. "No; she was resolved not to be blinded by vanity into thinking herself beloved by that 'calculatingly profligate man.' Not that the love of such a one, even if true, could be either a compliment or a gratification; but she would not be deceived, and she wished she were sure of his never having had, for one moment, the satisfaction of thinking he imposed on her."

Uncertainty on this point worried her considerably; and when she tried to rid herself from the perturbed and anxious sensations which beset her, by forcing her attention upon the things and persons immediately around, the effect was not always tranquillizing; in fact, the longer Katherine conversed with her companions, the more plainly she saw, by the mother's remarks and inuendos, and the daughter's seemingly accidental questions, that they suspected things concerning Lady Carew, that were only too near the truth. She saw, indeed, that, like Mr. Thornhill's positive little friend, they chiefly connected their suspicions with Mr. de Neyrac; but though the perception of this rendered some attacks more easy to parry, each observation, however guarded—each allusion, however remote—tended to show Katherine that her own position as the friend and inmate of a person already so disagreeably canvassed, had been almost an equivocal one. The reflection was painful; but, at the time,

she was so much more disturbed by the constant dread of confirming evil reports, even while denying particulars which she knew—or believed, at least—to be false, that the weariness of sitting, as it were, for ever in the "witness-box," soon began to outweigh every other. She found it a positive relief to talk to Robert Hazlewood, who, whatever his opinions of her late hostess might be, showed no curiosity about her or her proceedings. In short, the dread of farther enlightening the mother and daughter, somewhat laid to sleep her other dread of giving encouragement to the son; while he, originally flattered (as indeed a wiser man might have been) by her having chosen to return to England in *his* company, rather than remain in Paris when he was leaving it, derived fresh confidence from her greater inclination to listen to whatever he had to say. The result was, that as they were crossing the Channel (which happened to be smooth), he made her a proposal in form, to which she had the annoyance of having to give a distinct refusal, almost in the presence of his mother and sister.

If the former part of her journey had been but moderately agreeable, the remainder became perfectly odious; and the most constrained courtesy thenceforth directed the whole intercourse between her and her companions, chilling even her farewell thanks for their escort. She felt almost ready to rush into the arms of the old coachman, who was waiting for her, with the phaeton, at the turn of

the road where she was to quit the Hazlewoods' protection; and the first sight of the Wyngate woods moved her with a joy she could not have supposed their well-known aspect would ever have stirred in her bosom. It was not so very long since she had penned her eager petition for extended "leave of absence" from that home she was then so little anxious to revisit; while now all bygone things appeared to be swallowed up in thankfulness for nearing her harbour of refuge. The vehemence of feeling, which overpowered her as she met her mother and sisters in the hall, astonished them—and herself no less; but her evident inability to answer questions at first, possibly prevented any very inconvenient ones from being put, till after the return of composure had brought with it the self-possession requisite for making all answers square with the letter, in which she had informed her family that they might expect her. Katherine's strong emotion also induced the belief that, though she had not used the word, she had been, in reality, "home sick;" and albeit Mrs. Oakly had her private reasons for wishing that this complaint had come upon her daughter rather later, the notion was too flattering to be disagreeable.

Katherine's sensations, after the first half hour, were those of a peaceful happiness, proportioned to that extreme doubt and distress of mind in which she had existed for the last few days; her own warmth had called forth something corresponding to it in her mother's welcome; Annie's delight at

seeing her again, equalled, nay, surpassed her expectations; and the pleasure with which she revisited all her old haunts was certainly not diminished by doing so in company of that guest, so welcome to her of old, whom she had never expected to see again an inmate of the house. His presence was a comfort in every sense; for besides her thinking him, in himself and by himself, a most agreeable addition to the home circle, it helped to shield her from those endless cross-questionings to which the "returned traveller" is invariably subjected; and she rejoiced that politeness to Lewis Markham forbade her being made absolutely the sole speaker at breakfast, dinner, and luncheon. She thought she had now learnt to value her home sufficiently to be proof against its monotony, and had already formed plans for the future of giving Annie daily lessons in drawing and in Italian, which would, she hoped, be useful both to teacher and pupil; but in the meantime, "things as they were" appeared remarkably pleasant, and her spirits rose accordingly.

Thus had two days passed happily; and the more happily, because it seemed that many other such days of easy, careless enjoyment were likely to be yet in store. But Mrs. Oakly, though something like the expression of hearty satisfaction at her daughter's sudden arrival, had been, as it were, surprised out of her, was by this time falling gradually back into her chronic state of looking at the black side of things. Her relapse had probably

been hastened by her daughter's having thought it necessary to confide to her, that morning, that she had refused a positive proposal from Robert Hazlewood. Now Mrs. Oakly had had a confused notion that Katherine might, perhaps, meet with a "suitable establishment" while in Paris with Lady Carew; but as it was evident that nothing of the kind had occurred, she was all the more vexed to discover that her daughter had just cut herself off from the only unexceptionable alliance their own neighbourhood presented. "And then about Lewis Markham, too," considered she, as she slowly opened her work-box, "was there ever anything so unlucky? When it had been all settled for him to come directly Kate was gone, to have had his visit put off and put off on account of Mr. Harvey's not being able to receive him first! And then the very day after his arrival, when we believed Kate was to stay in Paris full six weeks longer, to get that letter saying she was coming home directly! George asked him for three weeks; he won't stay quite so long, on account of his uncle's birthday, but he is here for better than a fortnight; and there is Herbert Desborough has offered himself for Monday week, 'to have a serious talk' about Fred! I see he is very angry with him—doesn't feel how injudicious it is of Mr. Streatfield to treat a lad of his fine manly temper as he has been doing lately—and if he is put out by seeing his warnings about Markham neglected, there is no chance of my making him understand

how matters really stand with the poor boy! It's terribly awkward his meeting Lewis here; but things do always happen so inconveniently!"

Mrs. Oakly's face lengthened and lengthened, as her soliloquy proceeded; and by the time she had concluded with this, her favourite axiom, it might be said, without much exaggeration, that she looked ten years older than when she began. She worked on, however, at some elaborate piece of embroidery, destined, ultimately, to adorn the person of "baby," and only raised her eyes when she became aware that her husband had entered the room.

"Where's Lewis Markham?" inquired she, with such a nervous look and manner as would certainly have made most men inquire in return, "whether she expected to hear he was drowned?" Mr. Oakly however, replying simply to his wife's words, and not to the tone in which they were uttered, informed her, as he carelessly took up the "Bell's Life," that lay on the table, "that he had left Markham with the girls, sitting under the elms, near the new paling."

"I wish, George," sighed his wife, "I wish you could have made them come in with you! or else, even if you *had* tired yourself standing about the fish-ponds, you might have sat down in the wood with them?"

"What! am I in the way here?" asked he, quietly.

"You know it's not that I mean—know it very

well," rejoined his wife, in a querulously injured tone.

"Then, what *do* you mean? Oh, I believe I see what you are fidgeting about; but the truth is, your dread of the Desboroughs makes a perfect fool of you, Maria; and, whatever *you* may do, *I* should be ashamed to let Lewis Markham think I distrusted him, and was afraid to leave him with the girls! When I don't consider a man fit to be left half an hour alone with Kate (not that they *are* alone now), why, I don't ask such a fellow to the house."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Oakly. "I wasn't meaning anything against Lewis, I'm sure; but I can't help wishing that we had known sooner about Kate, or that the Hazlewoods had stayed another fortnight in Paris."

"Well, I wish they had, if it would have kept you from worrying yourself as you do; but I believe, in my heart, that you have no cause; and, anyhow, I am glad to see the girl back. She had been long enough away.

"Oh, quite long enough! longer than I at all liked," said Mrs. Oakly, in a funereal tone. "I couldn't bear the notion of that addition to her stay abroad, though it seemed hard to refuse consent; and I was but too happy to have poor dear Kate home again! More especially considering what affection and sensibility she showed on seeing us again! To say truth, I had no conception she would have felt her return as she did; for I had

sometimes thought, and been rather hurt at thinking, that she was a little cold towards her family; towards me, even; towards every one except Cecy Langton; but I did her injustice, I perceive. I shall never forget how she flung her arms round me the day before yesterday as she came in, and what a flood of tears she shed! I was positively alarmed at her agitation! Yet for all that, I do wish the dear child had either never entertained the plan of staying longer with the Carews, or else kept to it when she had once announced it to us. That second feeling of hers, 'that she had been too long away, and ought to come home,' was right and affectionate, and I'm glad to see the kind of thing in her; but it's not the less true that I am put in a very awkward predicament with regard to Herbert Desborough, when he comes here the week after next. What will he think of our having Lewis Markham here, and what can I do?"

"Do! nothing at all!" cried her husband. "What *is* there to be done? Either you must shew Herbert Desborough that you *have* a halfpenny-worth of common sense, and act accordingly; or else go yourself up to Markham, and tell him you prefer his room to his company, with your reasons for the same. He'd be rather surprised at them, I have a notion!" added he, partly to himself, while his eye wandered over the paper he held in his hand.

Mrs. Oakly's looks expressed her abhorrence of either alternative, and a pause ensued, after which

she exclaimed, in a lamentable voice, yet with more of energy than was her wont:

"What would I not give for Kate to be married!"

Mr. Oakly looked up again from his "Bell's Life," to remark, in a tone something between joke and impatience, on "the confounded hurry women were always in to be rid of their girls."

"Not," proceeded he, "that you are likely to get what you want, for one while at least, considering the way you go to work."

"That's the very thing," replied she, "that makes me so miserable! I *can* do nothing; for I *must* consider the Desboroughs. I can't help that any more than I can help Kate's refusing Robert Hazlewood, as she has done."

"Has Kate refused Bob Hazlewood?" asked Mr. Oakly. "What, in Paris?"

"No," answered his wife, gravely, "it was as they were coming over;" and she then proceeded to relate, with a running commentary of regrets and lamentations, whatever she had been told of the circumstances of the case. Unfortunately the matter did not strike her husband in the tragical point of view in which she felt and represented it; for he laughed till the tears came into *his* eyes, and something like a flash of anger into hers, at witnessing the "levity" with which he treated Kate's "throwing away her prospects."

"The truth is, my dear," said he, when his convulsions subsided, "the truth is, I can't look on

Robert Hazlewood as such a loss; he's a good fellow in his way; there's many a girl he might make a good husband for; but it wouldn't suit Kate to have one she looked down upon; so, as *I* am not in a hurry to be quit of her, and am not afraid of Lewis Markham, nor of Herbert Desborough (though I could dispense with his company here), I can't echo "groan for groan" with you on the subject of the refusal."

After faintly murmuring, "that she wished they had no cause to be afraid of the Desboroughs," Mrs. Oakly sank into a silence which had some appearance of resignation; but she presently broke it with the exclamation:

"What a pity I didn't accept Mrs. Spencer Langton's invitation for Annie to go to the Moat next week!"

"Why, I thought you particularly objected to her going on a visit, just after she had been running wild during Miss Freeman's holiday?"

"Yes, but if I had had the spirit of prophecy and accepted, it would be so very easy to make some excuse to-morrow or next day, and send Kate instead! Now, though I am sure Mrs. Langton *will* ask her in the course of the summer, I am not at all sure she will at this time, when it would be so *very* convenient that she should! Her uncles would look on the Moat as quite unobjectionable, so perfectly quiet."

"It's *quiet* enough, God knows, here," observed her husband, somewhat impatiently.

"Yes," she began, "but . . ."

"But my house is made objectionable by the presence of a relation of mine, who could, if he chose, propose to those men's niece. When the Desboroughs have once said a thing, you lose the use of your understanding, and I grow afraid of shadows!"

"I'm sure I hope I'm mistaken!" cried she, raising her eyes, despairingly. "Still, you know —is that a ring at the gate, George? Do see if it's anyone! I fancied it was too late for visitors."

"Only five o'clock," returned her husband; "and it *was* the lodge bell, certainly," added he, rising, and going to a side window, whence he could (unseen) reconnoitre whatever might be driving up the avenue.

"It looks like the Lancefields' barouche," said he; "and yet it's not Mrs. Lancefield, I'll swear. I do believe Cecilia Langton is in it, let the other woman be who she may."

"Cecilia Langton! Impossible!" exclaimed Mrs. Oakly.

"I think you will find it very possible," said Mr. Oakly, retiring from his point of observation, as the vehicle came to the door; and, a moment after, all doubt was ended by the butler's announcing "Mrs. and Miss Langton."

"Oh! I see; she's at her brother's," said Mrs. Oakly, who now rose to receive the two ladies, with as much warmth of manner as it was in her nature to shew; while her husband greeted them

both with the cordial welcome he gave to all friends, old or new.

"Let Miss Desborough know," said Mrs. Oakly to the servant, who disappeared in quest of her.

"Is she here, then?" inquired Cecilia, immediately. "Alicia had told me," continued she, glancing at her sister-in-law, "that Kate was to spend at least another month in Paris!"

"So she was, my dear; but—but there she is, to answer for herself," added Mrs. Oakly, as her two daughters and Lewis Markham, who had been met by the servant a few paces from the house, entered the drawing-room together.

END OF VOL. I.

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